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THE GROWING CHURCH



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The Growing Church

A STUDY FOR THE TIMES

CLELAND BOYD McAFEE
FORTY-FIRST STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO



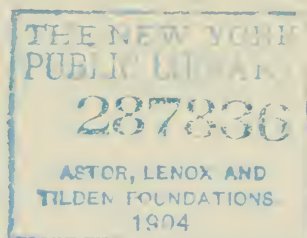
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I WOULD DEDICATE THIS LITTLE BOOK TO
MY WIFE, DID I NOT REALIZE THAT IT IS HERS
ALREADY BY NO WORD OF MINE, IF THE CHIEF
INSPIRATION AND THE MOST HELPFUL SUG-
GESTIONS CAN CONSTITUTE A CLAIM.

The Chapters

I.—A Typical Growing Church.

II.—The Divine Element in Church Growth.

III.—The Preaching of the Growing Church.

IV.—The Separation of the Church.

V.—The Discomfiture of Hypocrites.

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VII.—Some Hints of Method.

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I. A TYPICAL GROWING CHURCH.

NOT long ago I found myself in the city of Philadelphia, with an hour to spare before my train was due. I wandered again into old Independence Hall, and presently found myself in the upstairs room where was framed the first constitution of the United States. There I noticed the high backed chair with its quaint carving, of which John Fiske tells in one of his volumes. This is the incident: After the momentous act of signing the new constitution which was to be presented to the country for adoption, the room grew very still. The men who had spent months in thought and debate, knew that their task was done and were weighted with the meaning of it. Washington sat with bowed head, his face buried in his hands. On the back of his chair, in which he had presided over the many sessions of the convention, was emblazoned a half sun, brilliant with gilded rays. Benjamin Franklin, then eighty-one years of age, pointed to the emblem and said, "As I have been sitting here all these weeks, I have often wondered whether yonder

Critical Period. Ch. vii.

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sun was rising or setting. Now I know that it is a rising sun."

Is the
church gain-
ing or not?

Franklin's question comes into the mind of many men who are thoughtfully observing the signs of our own times. The sun is not in the zenith. It is yonder just above the horizon. But are we facing the east and a rising sun, or the west and a setting sun? Is the church of God making real headway, is it winning, is it facing better daylight? Or is it still slumbering, is it losing ground in the contest, is it going into deeper night before it comes to the noon day? Is it in the dusk or in the dawn? Two eminent religious leaders and observers have recently taken opposite ground on the question. One sees an advancing kingdom; the other sees a kingdom making no large headway. One believes we are coming to the noonday; the other expects the noonday as well, but believes we are now passing into a shadow which will deepen before we come into the light. One sees a church aroused and at work; the other sees a church slumbering still and indifferent in its work.

When such men differ, the rest of us have a right to ask questions. It is well for us to ask

A Typical Growing Church

at least this much: If the kingdom of God is growing, if the sun is rising, by what means on our part is it being brought about? If the kingdom is not growing, if the sun is setting, where is the fault? The Chinese have a proverb: "What will you have? says God; pay for it and take it." It is not too much to say that if the church of this day wants a rising sun and will pay for it, it may have it. If, on the other hand the church pays the price of a setting sun, it will have that.

There are some of us who feel that we are not entirely ignorant of the indifference of the church, but who cannot see the sun as a setting one, to whom the kingdom of God is growing, to whom the Word of God is prevailing as it has not done for years before. And yet there are sins of indifference which ought to trouble our hearts. If we mean to see the kingdom grow, how shall we bring it about? How does the kingdom grow on its human side? I am not forgetting, we may never wisely forget for an instant, that the power of the kingdom of God lies in God, and yet it is true that for us the most important element in its growth is that with which we are charged. Time was when

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men thought the sun rose over a fixed earth. We have learned in astronomy, what we need to learn in religion, that the rising or the setting of the sun is determined by the turning of the earth toward the sun or away from it. Under what conditions does the church turn toward the sun? When may we frankly put the responsibility for the growth of the church on God, feeling that we have done our share?

A typical
case of
growth.

Whatever our theories of such matters may be, and we ought to have them, we need to test them by the cases which appear in history. Probably no church of New Testament times is more fully described than that at Ephesus, and it repays study as a typical instance of a church growing. Whatever principles may be found ruling in this case will be worth applying to present conditions. There are some reasons why the church at Ephesus is of special pertinence to our own time. The odds were heavily against its growth. Opposition was intense, and the young church quietly gathered up that opposition into its own life and used it to advance its own interests. If the church of the present day thinks the spirit of commercialism is its most serious foe, that was the foe of the

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early Ephesian church, a foe intrenched in the whole life of the people. If the church to-day feels that its position is misunderstood, that it is charged with indifference to the real needs of the people and with being out of harmony with the spirit of the times, so was the Ephesian church. If the church of the present finds its grave peril in the readiness of its members and of those about it to become indifferent to its best interests and to adopt fads and fancies, so did the Ephesian church. Most of all, if the present church finds but few men who are ready to open their lives to the sovereign Spirit of God and to yield to His mastery, so did the church at Ephesus. The accounts in the Acts, in the Epistle of Paul, and in the little letter to the "angel of the church" in the second chapter of the Revelation, suggest singular likeness between that church and the church of our own day.

Acts 19.

Rev. 2:1-7.
1 Tim. 1:3.

The case is a pertinent one, also, because it is one wherein the miracles and unusual powers attributed to the leaders were in use and yet had no large effect and were not magnified. We are told of them with the unique expression, nowhere else used, I believe, that they were

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Acts 19:11.

Acts 2:17.

Acts 28.

“special miracles.” No prominence is given them in the account, and in his address to the elders of the church sometime after, Paul makes no reference to them whatever, though it would have been most natural to have done so. In the epistle he makes no mention of them, and they are not used in the letter of the Spirit to the church in the Revelation. They were wrought, but they served a purely temporary purpose. The need and the service of the wonderworking power were rapidly disappearing, and after this we have record of any such power only twice, and then under most peculiar circumstances, though the record continues for nearly thirty years. You no sooner begin to talk of such things in the present day than some one bemoans the weakness of the church in that it has lost this miraculous power. It is not to the point here to discuss that question. Enough to say just now that it is far from proved that the church would be one whit the stronger if it were thought of as an agency for the cure of men’s bodies or the healing of physical diseases. And at any rate, the Ephesian church did not grow by means of

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miracles, and if we have not the power of wonderworking, we have the same chance as it had for continuous and wide-reaching growth.

At one or two points, indeed, the church of the present day has distinct advantage over the early church. It is striking that immediately after the increase in the organization of the church, which made all its work more orderly, we are told that it made a marked advance. That hints at the value of organization and equipment. A certain measure of this the Ephesian church had. But it could boast no such machinery for good service as that of the present church. It has become the fashion to say that we have too much organization, or as one of my brethren loves to say, that we have "run to wheels." That is matter for personal opinion. On this we shall agree, at any rate: a well organized church, with marshalled forces, is far better able to undertake the work of conquest than one in chaos and running at loose ends. It is better to have an over-organized army, than a shapeless mob. And it is largely our own fault if our churches ever seem over-organized. Every feeble society

Acts 6:7.

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means that some one saw a need which he tried to supply, and when he had his machinery ready for the work strength or zeal failed, and he went not to his task. Meanwhile are we sure he did not see a need and that the machinery was superfluous? The Ephesian church was not, at least, over-organized. There are hints that the organization had become rather definite, but it could hardly have been so highly developed as in any well regulated church of the present day.

Acts 20:28.

Nor had the Ephesian church the example and inspiration of other churches in such degree as has our church. There are instances which could be held up to it as noble and worthy of emulation, but there lay before it no such far-reaching record of great work as lies before any open-eyed church to-day. It requires an immense amount of forgetting for a man to lose his faith in God. It requires an unspeakable ignorance to say that the church may not hope to master the problems that are set before it. What then, shall we do with history? The Ephesian church had no history worth the hearing. Here were

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principles of life and of church control which were presented with authority: "They are good; try them." Yes, but suppose these principles have been put to the long test of the centuries and have been found good, does not the argument in their behalf gain weight? Every year of the life of the church gives its people an added advantage over the early church. And the Ephesian church had not the advantage generally supposed, that it had a sense of the personal presence and life of our Lord. It was remote from the scene of His earthly life, and its word of Him came from those who have told us the same story of their knowledge of Him. Their chief leader had probably never seen Him in the flesh, but had become passionately assured of Him on the Damascus road, when he saw Him with blinded eyes. Such assurance, that will not be gainsaid, comes to men of our own day without the outward signs of the presence of Christ, and they become mighty as Paul was, by reason of that assurance.

However close the parallel may seem, here is an early church, under apostolic leadership,

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which had such marked growth that it is frequently mentioned. The church of our own day, seeking to know how it may grow and approach the fulfillment of its purpose, may well take it into careful thought.

II. THE DIVINE ELEMENT IN CHURCH GROWTH.

HUMAN activity in the growth of the church, is, after all, only co-operation with God. Back of all our energy lies the divine power. That is the uppermost fact in all our theorizing about the matter. We hear very little lately about getting up a revival, and that little we do not like. The preposition gives a wrong angle to our thought. Revivals come down. The water of refreshing is poured down on the church; it is not pumped up. In a certain sense, therefore, the church must wait the gracious purpose of God for its time of marked growth. Whatever its people may do, the more real the reviving, the more certain they are at the end of it that it came as the gift of God.

This seems particularly true in the church in Ephesus. The theme of the Epistle, which certainly went to it, whether it was meant solely for that church or not, is the right of Christ as Head over His church. It is

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like one prolonged love-letter telling the virtues of the Lord of the new-wedded church. If we believe the account of Eusebius and think that John the Beloved passed his last days there, and if we see in the Gospel which he wrote his closing message, there is further suggestion of the sovereign right of Christ over His church. The fourth Gospel is the account of His life and work which most magnifies Himself and His mastery, not over winds and trees and things, but over minds and hearts. It is here the deep philosophy of the Christian theology is disclosed or hinted. It is here that Christ reveals the dependence of His church on Himself. If the Gospel was written in Ephesus, be sure the messages were many times spoken to the Ephesians.

There is one incident in connection with the account in the Acts, which makes the divine element in the growth of the church specially clear. There were twelve men, who were honest with the little they knew, who knew only a little. Twelve men—a new apostolate for that one church. Their words indicate that they knew there must be something more

Acts 19:1-7.

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than they yet had, but they had not received that better something, did not even know whether they might receive it. They were men who were willing to be led on into fuller knowledge and more explicit consecration. They called for no labored argument. They were open-hearted toward God. Their faces turned toward the sun. Thus they became a nucleus for the growing church. The activity of the church was in part an exudation from their Spirit-filled lives. So soon as they were ready for the gift of the Spirit, the gift came and they received Him into their lives.

It will be remembered that the first forward step of the church came after the Pentecost blessing, when three thousand were brought into the fellowship of the church. That gift was accompanied with the power to speak with tongues, about which so much discussion has been had. Once afterwards and here we are told that the power of tongues came with the gift of the Spirit. In the other cases no mention is made of any special or apparent accompaniments, save that there is new vigor and new ability for the work of the church. The

Acts 2:41.

Acts 10:45.

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gift of the Spirit was then and is now the pledge of God's power for the growth of His church.

The baptism
of the spirit.

There is abundant literature in the current catalogues on the baptism of the Spirit. Perhaps there cannot be too much. The purpose of this study is not advanced by analysis of the cases of the gift of the Spirit, since we are examining the human elements in the growth of the church. It is, however, much to the point to urge that in every case the Spirit came upon those who were willing in their own hearts to come under His control. There was a certain preparedness which made them fit. There was an honest obedience to the truth which they had received, which appears in all cases.

This much of the gift of the Spirit is in our own power. This past year I heard a burdened pastor say that the most disheartening feature of his church was the fact that he had none among his members who seemed dissatisfied with poor conditions that prevailed, or were ready to open their hearts to some new and better influence of the Spirit of God. I remember how sadly another pastor declared

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that he had no one in his church who was eager and restless for the winning of others. On the other hand a pastor of a packed church warned his brethren in my hearing that a well-equipped, largely attended church is in grave danger of becoming a powerless church, because it becomes content with things as they are, and has none of that dissatisfaction which is the foregleam of the coming of the Spirit. Some of the advice whereby we are urged to wait quietly for the gift of the Spirit loses its point in this fact: that He came upon His people sometimes in New Testament days when they were in the thick of their work, doing each day the thing which their teaching until then had given them power to do. The man who is faithful to the baptism of John and is open minded to something better is a fit subject for the coming of the Spirit in power. We need the quiet and calm of life that we may know some of the truths of God. But there are truths which we learn only as we follow on to know the Lord, out in the blaze of the busiest life. What He seeks in us is an honest open mindedness to the new and better things which He would reveal to

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us. That will lead us sometimes to the upper room, and its crowd of one hundred and twenty, or it may lead us to the small Ephesian group of a dozen, or to the Cornelian group of close friends. No matter, we shall receive the gift of the Spirit.

There is no record of the marked coming of the Spirit upon the whole Ephesian church. Doubtless He did come, but it was through the little nucleus first, through the little company who were ready. Upon the others He came in the power which was needed for their work. Every church of the present day waits and must wait for such a nucleus around which it may grow, through which the power of God may come upon it. The Spirit cannot come upon a few for all, but His power may come through a few for all. Can you who are reading this line, point out any reason why you should not be part in that nucleus in your own church? Are you certainly honest with all the truth you have received? Cannot you open your heart to any further and better thing which He may be ready to give you? Does it seem to you that there is something better than you yet know, some higher bap-

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tism which you have not received? Or are you benumbing your dissatisfaction with yourself and your spiritual attainments?

Sometimes a young man comes to me with a story of his spiritual life and its deadness, saying that he fears he is morbid, but he wants something that he sees others have. So deceitful are our hearts that it is almost dangerous to tell such an inquirer that his very dissatisfaction is part of his readiness for the better thing. The peril is that he may then turn his mind toward his own state of unrest instead of toward the better thing which he wants. But the thing which it may not be wise to say too clearly is the very true thing, for all that. We are in no condition to receive the larger gift of the Spirit until we know ourselves to lack something. We may not know whether the thing we lack is available, but we may know well that it is needed. Not many worse things can come to the life of a man than to stand in the presence of something that is confessedly better than his life has yet attained, and then settle down contentedly in the poorer life. Whatever the reasons he may give, it is always bad for a man

The need for dissatisfaction.

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to turn away from the highest ideals and content himself with the lower. It is that willingness to be something less than the best that makes it difficult for the conferment of the Spirit to come to us. We see other men manifesting a spirit of consecration which is far beyond our own. We know we ought to attain that level ourselves. For a time it makes us restless and dissatisfied. If then we begin to find excuses for ourselves, if we conjure up conditions in our case that are different from those in their cases, we are entering on the first act of the tragedy of the soul. Presently we will settle down to an ideal-less life, and then may God pity us! I often hear men say that God cannot use a discouraged man. I have reason to be glad that it is not quite true. Is it not true to say that He cannot magnify Himself in a satisfied man? Is it not the man who knows there is an unfulfilled promise in his life who receives the gift of the Spirit?

The Spirit is present.

At the same time, it must be noted that we need not wait for that enduement. Since Pentecost, the Spirit's power is a present fact in the church, and the need is that we shall be about the work for which already we are

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enabled of God, in full assurance that it is in the line of that service that further power comes. It is faithfulness to the baptism of John that brings us to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The other day one of my friends spoke of a community near my own home as "finished and roofed over." There are souls who count themselves so, and there are such churches. They have no sense of the larger thing that is possible. They have no sense of their smallness and incompleteness. They have said what the older version incorrectly makes the Ephesian apostolate say: "We have not heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." Is there anything better than we have? We have not heard of it. Our preacher, our choir, our growth, our prospects—can there be any better? If so, we do not know of them. Let no word be said against the happy life which many a church lives, but let it be urged that life that feels itself a fulfillment instead of a prophecy has somehow missed the point of its being. If we have not yet received the gift of the Holy Spirit, then there is something larger and better for us.

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Such a nucleus of open minded, Spirit-receiving men every church must have. At its very center, surely, ought to be the pastor. If any man may be expected to let the power of God fully and unreservedly into his life, it is he. His temptations to keep Him out are graver than any of his people know. How wretchedly ambition of the wrong sort lures him on! How almost impossible it is for him to keep sweet-spirited and humble before God when he is forever before people who watch him! One of the younger writers has just given us a book whose story turns on the career of a man who is unable to get away from his sense of the presence of other people. He is always asking what they will probably think of what he is doing. He magnifies little incidents in his life so that he may be more admired and more thought about by those who hear them. Alongside him is another man, a minister, who seems almost brutally indifferent to the opinions of others, is counted so very superior to applause that it seems cheap in his presence, but he also confesses before the story is written out that he is fighting the same subtle enemy in all his harsh-

"The Chameleon."

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ness. Down in his heart it is his constant question whether people have seen and have approved what he has done. He even comes to make his very indifference to them part of his eagerness to have them note him. Many a man knows what that struggle is. Or else there comes a kind of hardening toward other opinions than one's own, a satisfaction with the baptism one has received, which is perilous. There have been so many vagaries preached and taught, such fanciful things have been said and written about this very matter of the baptism of the Spirit that some of us are in danger of turning away from the whole of it, feeling that it is largely imagination, while down in our hearts we know there is something we have not that would make us more efficient in the service of the church. Or we become engrossed with the equipment of our churches and lose sight of what we know is their only hope of power. We get out of connection with the true source of strength. The hinges of our knees rust with disuse. Our Bibles open only to our texts. And yet it is we first of all who should go to form the Spirit-filled nucleus of the growing church.

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The people
waiting for
the pastor.

But if the pastor should not so yield himself, there are his people who may take the place. There are people with burdened hearts who are waiting for the moving of their pastors. Many a time at the end of a meeting where some strong man has voiced the call of God to something higher and finer than the life we are now living, I have heard devout men and women say with a sigh, "O, if only my pastor had been here." Let part of it be affectation, let part of it be goody-goody, it is still true that the people are at times in advance of their pastors in the knowledge of the Spirit's power. I have heard workers say, "We can do nothing; our pastor is not really a spiritual man." Have they a right to say such a thing? Is there but one way to be spiritual? May there not be ways wherein a man may be in true connection with the source of all power and yet not appear to hold such fellowship with Him as others may? In a western city a priest of the Catholic church, who was accused of a grave fault and against whom the evidence was conclusive, had seemed so hardened and had shown so little sense of sin that even his friends who exonerated him from the

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crime were amazed. As he sat in a great church waiting the judgment of his superior, he swooned away and presently died. When they disrobed him for his burial, they found wrapped around his loins a small chain, so bound that every step brought him pain, found it bedded in the flesh where he had worn it for years. Was he in no wise penitent though his penitence took not the forms of the penitence of most men? Are there not pastors who seem strangely indifferent to spiritual life whose currents of spiritual life run deeper than our own? One year I was assigned during the meeting of a church court to be entertained with a man whom I had always thought cold and unspiritual. His stateliness was nothing short of stiffness, and to hear his pulpit prayers you would have thought him stilted and distant. But as I watched him day by day, and heard him pray in his room, or heard his intimate conversation and marked its deep spiritual fervor, my heart condemned me. Here was a man who knew God as most men do not, who held everything in spiritual balances; yet to this day most men look at me incredulously when I say it of him.

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But even if a pastor is not in the inner circle may not there be such a circle? Are there not faithful, earnest men and women who are dissatisfied with what they now have and long for something better? Is there any reason why you, my brother, should not be one in your own church? It will not demand many to make the new apostolate for any church. From them the power spread in Ephesus. Through them the whole church was inspired. The power was from God, as it must always be, at the beginning and at the end, but it came upon them because they were ready for something better than their lives had and were willing to receive it.

Preaching of the Growing Church

III. THE PREACHING OF THE GROWING CHURCH.

AT THE very forefront of the account of the church at Ephesus stands this fact: that it grew by reason of faithful and persistent preaching and teaching. Several times we are told of this element in the history of the church. One quality of the preaching is too plain to be overlooked—what we may call the frankness of it, its completeness. There was no seeking to offend people, and no joy in having done so, but there was no effort to avoid it. At the very time when it was of importance to win the favor of men, Paul so preached that there was considerable offence taken. His preaching was not brutal, you may be sure of that; but it was utterly and explicitly frank. At the end of his ministry with the church he prided himself on the fact that he had dared to tell his hearers the whole counsel of God. Therein he felt himself pure from the blood of all men. Three suggestions are made as to the method of his preaching: he

Acts 20:20.

Acts 19:8.

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“reasoned,” appealed to men’s intellects; he “persuaded,” appealed to their wills; it is evident from the context that he did not fail to arouse their feelings. His appeal was to the whole man. This appeal was in behalf of the kingdom of God, and was so plainly based on the life and teaching of Jesus that He became the main thought of the hearers. Few preachers of the present day would ask any finer testimonial to their preaching than the words of the sons of Sceva, “I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.” Through all his reasoning and moving, Paul managed to keep it before even his most careless hearers that he was preaching Jesus. Finally, it is evident from the result that Paul did not do all the preaching. Enough was done so that all the people of the province heard the word within about two years. That means that the people who accepted Jesus became preachers, each in his own place and way.

Acts 19:13.

Acts 19:10.

The preaching for to-day.

All this suggests the need of the preaching of the present day. What is the sort of preaching that will make the church grow? We ministers do not pretend to know it all. We have much to learn from any man who will come to

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us with candid and kindly criticism. Certainly there can be no resentment of an adverse judgment. All that can be claimed in fairness is that we want to learn better. Surely, however, certain traits ought to mark the preaching of the present pulpit.

For one thing it ought to be frank and unreserved. It ought to deal with the actual conditions of men. It ought not to deal with sinning men as though there were no sin. It ought not to smooth matters over so that hearers know the man is preaching a half truth for the sake of favor. Better young Joseph Parker standing on the beam of the saw pit, out of an honest heart preaching hell and damnation, than a smooth-voiced softness that cannot bear to say an unpleasant truth. A wise old elder once offered the petition in my prayer meeting that I might never be afraid of the people when I sat in my study preparing to preach. I thought it an odd prayer. I now know it to be a very important one. There is nothing that can create a barrier between a preacher and his hearers more surely than their feeling that he is hedging on his own beliefs because he fears a frank

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statement would not be satisfactory to them. I went with a great crowd into a large hall in New York City one afternoon. A man just before me expressed with a half laugh the hope that a certain young man would not speak during the meeting. His friend asked him the reason. "O," he said, "that man always makes me uncomfortable when he speaks." Well, that is what preaching ought to do for us much of the time. It ought to make us uncomfortable if we have become satisfied with low ideals, if we have begun to yield to the lower life, if we are getting into the ways of sin. As the meeting went on, and the young man did speak, I saw quickly why he made men uncomfortable. There was such a persistent and explicit presentment of the claims of Christ upon life that no man who claimed allegiance to Him could bear the presence of sin in his life. If a man is in rebellion against Christ, or is leaving Him out of life, then surely our preaching ought to unsettle his self-satisfaction. And having done this, it ought to point quickly to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. It is little to make a

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man uncomfortable, unless he is made also to see the place where he may find comfort.

Every minister needs occasionally to go back over his sermons to see if the man who has followed him through a fair course of time has had a sight of all the great truths of God. Have I declared the whole counsel of God? I have laid stress on the need for conversion; have I also built up my people in the constructive truths? I have told them the story of the love of God; have I shunned to say any frank word of the holiness of God? I believe and preach that God is love; does it seem impossible to preach also that our God is a consuming fire? Have I dealt with my people's souls as I would have my own soul dealt with? Have I preached in sight of the judgment?

I do not find any one who does not say that there is lack of a keen sense of sin among men in these days. Some are glad that it is so, feeling that the sense of the perfect life is better than the sense of imperfection. But most of us do not see that the sense of the perfected life has come with the loss of the sense of

The sense
of sin.

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sin. It would doubtless be better for our hearers to be won to the life of holiness rather than be driven from the life of sin. But the loss of the sense of sin must have some reason. So far as it is traceable to causes in life outside of the control of the church we are not now concerned with it. It is fair to ask, however, whether it is not to be traced in part to our own failure to be frank with our people in matters of holiness and law. It is not to be supposed that mere harping on the law of God and the fact of sin is the cure. There is a good deal said about sin, after all. The law of God is not omitted from many sermons that I have a chance to hear. But there is nothing which so arouses our sense of sin and evil as the thought of the steps God has taken to be rid of it. The preaching of the cross as the means of God's atonement—is not that a theme too little used? We read a great many rhapsodies on Christ. Rhapsodies do not save. We do not read so much about an atoning Christ. And until we come ourselves and bring our people into sight of the death of Christ as the means of salvation, we and they will have a weak sense of sin.

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Some of us may be at no fault in this regard. Is it still possible that our people have become calloused with our repeated denunciation of sin, and have come to expect it from us, so that it means less? Constant dropping wears away the stone but have you not noticed how the plastic clay grows hard and stony under the perpetual dropping of the water under your eaves? May it not be that we have denounced sin without the tender word of salvation and pardon? An old minister said to a younger brother one day, "Ah, laddie, you left us bruised and bleeding, but you said no word of the good Physician who was near by." One of my brethren asked once if it were not possible to preach the love of God so fully that men would take encouragement in sin from it. Not so fully, no, but in such manner perhaps. Might we not take our people quite around the cross, letting them stand with us at the back of it where is only rough wood, rigid and hard like the law which it fulfils, letting them stand on the left side where the thrust of the spear has brought out the cleansing blood, letting them stand on the right side with its outreaching hand of help for our needs, letting them stand last in front

The circuit
of the cross.

The Growing Church

where they may see the face of one like ourselves, thorn-crowned and worn in our behalf, a Son of God and Brother to us all? Does not the whole counsel of God involve all that? May we not make the whole circuit?

The appeal
to reason.

Present day preaching ought to make its appeal to the whole man. I do not know that any one sermon can do it, but in the long run of the sermons, the whole man ought to be touched. The sermon ought to make appeal to the reason of man, ought to have its severe logic, its strong reasoning, which brings us into such relation to truth that we cannot be honest with ourselves without accepting it. If the truth cannot be so presented, then it is not the truth. No man gives up his intellect when he accepts Christ. He never finds it until then. "It is in presence of The Word that we learn the use of words." I fear there may be men turned away from the truth of Christ because they find individual cases of such bad reasoning that they doubt the whole teaching. A University professor said a while ago that he did not go to church because he found himself in constant rebellion against the logical processes that were employed. I know one minister who

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has failed in an important place in large part because he could not hold his own as a thinker with the men of his church. They had not thought largely in his own line, and he had every chance, but they had thought in their own line, and thinking is the same whatever your line, and they could see through his closest mesh of argument. A teacher once said of a pupil in my hearing: "Yes, he is going to be a preacher. He is no thinker, so he will never have anything to say, but he will say it uncommonly well." But sermons that have nothing in them, even if that be uncommonly well said, will not make a strong and growing church.

And the preaching ought to make its strong appeal to the will. It ought to call men to decision. The church is not a school where people are taught. It is not a club-house where people get together for their own pleasure. The church is a place where men are brought to decision and action. It is a place where men are inspired to say, "I will" to God at some point in their lives where they have been silent before this. Preaching which does not appeal to a man's will may be very

The appeal
to the will.

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entertaining and may be very eloquent but it will not make a growing church. That is one marked difference between an essay and a sermon. An essay may be profitably read from a pulpit perhaps, but it is not a sermon. From my Seminary days I have carried Dr. Hastings' story of Lyman Beecher and the sermon on repentance. Driven from his work by physician's orders, the senior Beecher had gone to the seashore, where he was fishing and roughing it. One Sunday morning he went to a little church whose young pastor recognized him and insisted that he preach. "Not at all," was the answer, "I am in fishing clothes, I have no sermon and I am here to rest." So the young fellow went into the pulpit and, as Beecher told it, "read a very good essay on repentance," defined it, showed how necessary it is and—sat down. "Then," said the sturdy theologian, "I went up into the pulpit, fishy as I was, and put the cracker on that sermon, told the people it meant that they must repent or they would be lost, every one of them, and dismissed the congregation." Turning to the preacher, he said, "Sir, you ought to be hung! It is a capital crime to

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bring people into presence of such a truth and never make them feel it as their personal business." We do not need people who know what repentance is, but people who know how to repent and have done it. The sermon must shut a man up to some sort of decision, a decision of mind or of act. It must make appeal to his will. A man once said to me about Dr. John Hall, that he could preach the doctrine of the sovereign election of God so that you felt like going out at once and getting to work.

Certainly the preaching of the present day has its appeal to make to the feelings of men. We are very much afraid of that. We do not like emotional preachers. It is so possible to make a cheap appeal to the emotions. Our tears all lie near the surface and a pathetic incident or a touching poem may often jostle them over. In one sermon of a popular preacher, who has singular power with men, I witnessed the touching death of six persons and the people wept at each bedside. I asked a brother minister once what he thought of a certain evangelist. "I do not like him at all," he replied, "he is always boring for water." You have not made a man a Christian

The appeal
to the feel-
ings.

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because you have made him weep. Nor have you converted him because you have made him laugh at a funny story. You may make only a cheap appeal to his tears.

But we would err sadly if we allowed that fact to hide from us the appeal which the gospel of Christ makes to the emotions. Belief is an act of the intellect; acceptance of Christ is an act of the will; but love is an act of the emotions. And it is love that is set out in fullest relief in the Scriptures. It is one of our saddest defects that we are so unmoved by that which ought to thrill us. We can speak of the loss of men, with no quiver in our voices. We can speak of the glory that awaits the believer, with no thrill of our hearts. It is a sane remark of a sane man that we are suffering from dry-eyed conversions and a dry-eyed church. Mothers will weep great tears over the failing health of sons, but will discuss with steady voices their animosity to eternal things. Friends will speak sadly of the tendency of a young man to be frivolous so that he cannot succeed in business, but will treat as a matter of course his indifference

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to his spiritual life. We need to be roused from our calmness.

If such appeal is to be made it must come from the heart of the preacher. Much of our preaching is too placid, too unmoved. If we would put more passion of our hearts into the sermons we preach, we would have a better church growth. I know a teacher of young men of whom I have said many times, what I now repeat, that the most eloquent thing about him is the tears that come to his eyes when he is pleading with men in behalf of Christ. In a house of mourning, a friend said to me concerning the daughter of the house, "I fear for her reason; she cannot weep." When the ministry cannot weep, it is time to fear for its power. Any thoughtful man knows what is meant. The breaking out of the tears of a weak man has no power. Habitual pulpit weeping is contemptible. But when a strong man comes in sight of the abyss and sees men going toward it, or in sight of the glory and finds men going toward that, and sees it all so clearly that it overcomes him, there never fails to be power in the preaching.

Passion in
preaching.

The Growing Church

The theme
of preach-
ing.

Meanwhile, what shall the pulpit of the day present to the people as a message? What shall be our theme as ministers? If we ask the people, we shall have a varied answer. Some will tell us that they have no use for logic or for doctrine. Don't give us essays, they say, give us the gospel. They cannot see that the gospel makes its best appeal to the intellect of some men. Others say, Don't harp on action; educate people; teach the truth; above all, don't make people commit themselves in church by having them stand up or sign papers of all sorts. Others would have the sermons devoted to the things of the day, to the effort to point out the connection between the gospel of Christ and the events which transpire around us. We are reminded that Dr. Alexander of Princeton used to read the newspapers to see how the kingdom of God is going. Some men abuse the church if it does concern itself with current events, and call its minister sensational; other men abuse the church if it does not concern itself with current events and count its minister a spinner of cobwebs, weaving fantastic notions about the future life instead of dealing with the hard

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realities of the present. In one of our cities recently a prominent club woman explained the supposed defection of women of her own sort from the church by the fact that ministers are preaching so much about the future life about which they know no more than the women do, and are not saying enough about the present life with which they are more concerned. Have we not somewhere heard men say that they think if a man does about as near right as he knows and treats his neighbor right in this life, he need have no fear about the future? The argument is that a minister must tell him how to do about as near right as possible here and let the next world take care of itself.

All this might be very confusing, if the solution of the difficulty did not lie so plainly in the habit of Paul's own preaching: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." The preaching is to be no harping on one string, no iteration and reiteration of one theme, but a comprehensive, all-embracing estimate of life and its needs in terms of the crucified Lord of life. It leaves room for philosophy and science and

Paul's
theme.

1 Cor. 2:2.

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history and current events. But it furnishes the standard by which everything is to be gauged. The preaching is to be in the interest of the kingdom, at whose head is the crucified Christ. Several years ago I had the good fortune to drop in one day into Dr. Wm. M. Taylor's church when he was delivering a sermon commemorative of some anniversary in his ministry. It was then I first heard the illustration of that word of Paul which Dr. Taylor made famous. He said that Jesus became a pivot for the preaching of Paul, a center from which he could sweep the entire circle of human knowledge and learning, as the hands on the face of your clock sweep the circle of all the hours of the day, and yet are pivoted at the center and never move from it. At any moment of the day, you may start from the end of the clock hands and trace back an unbroken connection with the pivot whence comes the power of motion. And at any point in the preaching of Paul, however remote it might seem to be, you might trace back an unbroken connection with the crucified Christ. It was in this sense that he preached Christ only. He took his point of view at the cross, and viewed

The pivotal
point of
truth.

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everything in its light and from its angle. Dr. William J. Chichester, beloved of all who knew him, under whose ministry nearly five thousand persons were received into the church, of whom more than two thousand professed their faith in response to his preaching, told a revealing fact in my hearing once. It was that he sought to saturate his preparation for the pulpit with prayer. In selecting the text, in outlining the sermon, in the detail of preparation and in the preaching, he had one great petition always in his mind: that he might be loyal to the one message of his life, that he might never lose the sight or the sympathy of the cross of Christ. I asked him privately after the little meeting where he had said it, what he counted the great ambition of his ministry. Instantly he replied, "Oh, to make men know Jesus Christ!" At a dinner in Philadelphia one evening I asked an elder of Dr. Maltbie D. Babcock's New York church what was the secret of the unusual place which he took in that city during his short stay there. He replied by saying that Dr. Babcock doubtless had a peculiarly attractive personality, but that he gave you the impression from the very first that

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he counted it such a splendid thing to be a Christian that he wanted everybody else to be one. His preaching and his personal conversation, his whole manner of life, made you feel that he had the one passion to make men know Him.

The chief of police of one of our largest cities has recently taken the ministry to task for not bringing the sanctions of the moral law to bear more heavily on the minds of men. He explains in part the difficulty in enforcing civil law by the tendency of ministers to smooth over the proper demands of the law of God. He points out that the civil officers can do nothing but restrain men's outward acts, warning them not to do this or that on penalty of detection and punishment. On the other hand, the church ought to be able to root out of men's hearts any desire to do the wrong thing. There is much truth in the plea. Each one must decide for himself whether the ministry is doing its part. The opportunity and need are exactly what the officer suggests.

And yet there is another word to be said. Men are not brought to obedience at Sinai so readily as at Calvary. The example of Mis-

Preaching
the law.

Sinai or
Calvary?

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sionary Richards in the Congo Valley is worth much. He seemed unable to bring his hearers to any sense of sin or any wish for pardon by even his most faithful preaching of the ten commandments and the law written in every man's heart. It was only when the natives came in sight of the cross of Christ and saw what sin means to God that they learned what it ought to mean to themselves.

None of us realizes what it means for a man to be lost, but we can guess something of its meaning when we think what God did about it. A little while ago, a famous surgeon was brought from Austria to the city of Chicago to perform an operation on the little daughter of a wealthy man. The papers reported that his fee was \$20,000. It was a long journey, and involved immense cost. I do not know what was the matter with the little one. I know it was no scratched finger, no bruised forehead from her play. Whatever it was, I know it must have been something serious because of what the father did about it. The best measure we shall ever find for the depths into which men have fallen will be the length

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of the arm with which God reached help to them.

The absolute necessity.

It is this which demands our preaching Christ. We must preach Him as the atoning Savior who claims headship over the church and over every man. We must preach Him winsomely, strongly, completely, the full-orbed Christ. But we must preach Him, Him—constantly. One Sunday afternoon I came out of the Brick Church in New York with a great throng who had been listening to Dr. Babcock. There were evidently a great many strangers, some of whom were there from curiosity. Just before me were two men, unaccustomed to the place. I heard one say to the other, "Well, what did you think of him?" The second roused himself from his meditation, and said earnestly, "What did I think of him? I do not know what I thought of him. But I know I think more of God for what he said." The next day I told Dr. Babcock what I had heard and he was glad. His ministry had accomplished its end.

The Separation of the Church

IV. THE SEPARATION OF THE CHURCH.

ALL this is not a matter for the preacher alone. The task is manifestly too great for him. Be sure "the whole of Asia" did not hear the word from the mouth of Paul. The message is one for all the people who believe. No church prospers in its minister alone. Let him be never so eloquent, never so devout, if it remains with him, and his people do not become eloquent for Christ in their lives and devout in their spirit, the church is not ready to grow. That suggests another element in the growth of the Ephesian church.

The part of
the people.

Until this time, the Christians had been a branch of the Jewish synagogue. They had no separate name, and had met in any synagogue that was available. For the most part, they were simply tolerated as large minded people of the present day tolerate others who are unusual but not harmful. It was some time after this that the break between Christianity and Judaism became open and acknowledged in Jerusalem. There had been, however, a grow-

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Acts 19:9.

ing breach of life and manner between the Christians and the current life. At Ephesus, at last, they separated from those who were not followers of Christ, and became a clear-cut body by themselves. Casting in their lot with an un-Jewish company for their place of meeting, they were cut off from the synagogue and from any other religious group. They continued to mingle with the others in business and social life, but they became in the sight of all men different from those who were not Christians. The difference was one of principle, of course, and not of appearance, but there appeared a wide enough line between Christians and non-Christians so that the difference could be noted. During the Boxer troubles in China, one of the marauders asked his chief how he should know a Christian when he saw one. The chief replied, "Look closely at the forehead of any of them, under his cap, and you will find a cross." While you cannot find any such mark, the distinction is deep enough to be of utmost importance. Here for the first time the Christians became other than Jews.

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Now, that was the only way in which there could be any emphasis given to the claim of Christians to have a law of life superior to that about them. You must have a certain amount of perspective before you can judge a life, or even a theory of life. You never know the life you live with every moment. You need to hold it off from you a little sometimes and compare it with other lives if you are to judge its value. And if the church and the world are to be the same, then how is the Church to argue for its own betterness?

The argu-
ment of
difference.

There are just two ways whereby the world and the church can become the same. Either the church must become worldly, or the world must become Christian. It is the ambition of Christ that this latter should happen. It is the fault of Christians that the former happens. Some one gave me a tract the other day which told of the effort of the world to gain the fellowship of the church.

The Church and the World walked far apart,
On the changing shore of time;
The World was singing a giddy song,
And the Church a hymn sublime.

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“Come give me your hand,” said the merry World,
“And then walk with me this way.”
But the good Church hid her snowy hand,
And solemnly answered, “Nay.”

But the World continued to seek the fellowship of the Church and at last won its way, scorning the modesty of the Church and the poverty of its garments and the roughness of its way. Presently they were walking side by side—but in the World’s path, not in the Church’s path. And only the eye of God could see which was His Church and which was the ungodly World.

“Then the angel drew near the mercy-seat,
And whispered in sighs her name,
And the saints their anthems of rapture hushed,
And covered their heads with shame.”

It is a long poem, worth the reading, but it tells a sad and true tale. It is the weakness of the Church that its members are not to be distinguished in life and conduct from those who are not its members. They must mingle with others, even the veriest haters of Christ, in business and in travel and in society—they must and they should. But they are bound in

The weakness of likeness.

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honor to be different from them, to live a separated life among them. There are countless opportunities whereby they may declare their unlikeness to others. Their new motive makes them radically and deeply different from those with whom they mingle. They are not their own, they are bought with a price. They have yielded themselves unto God, and whatever they do in word or deed, they are pledged to do as unto the Lord and not unto men.

It is in this way only that they can show the joy of the Christian life. There are many who count the Christian life a dismal one, in which self-denial means bitter hardship. Young people are constantly saying that they cannot come to Christ because they are not yet ready to give up this thing or that and so lose their pleasure in life. A mother told me in the very week in which this is written that she did not believe in child Christians because she felt children ought to have a jolly time, and "of course they would have to settle down from all that once they went into the Church and declared themselves Christians." I read the other day of an old colored man in the south who had been brought up in the

The joy of
the sepa-
rated life.

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family of a staunch Presbyterian. One night he attended a Methodist revival service and was so impressed with the fervor of the preacher and the zeal of the converts, that he joined the church himself. The next day his old master met him, and said, "What is this I hear? You have joined the Methodists? Didn't I bring you up a good Presbyterian?" "O yes, massa, yessa, de Presbyterians is mighty nice folks and de Presbyterian chu'ch is a mighty fine chu'ch; but hones', now, massa, doan you think it's a powerful dismal chu'ch for a niggah?" There are young people, there are older people, who think Christians are nice folks, and the church is all right, and the Christian life is doubtless the right life for anybody who can stand it, but it is all dismal and unattractive. The fault is partly their own, I know. I am now concerned with the fact that it is partly the fault of the Christians themselves.

When I was on my way to the ministry, a young woman asked me if I enjoyed preaching. Her older sister rebuked her for such a question, saying that young men were not going into the ministry because they enjoyed it, but

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from a serious sense of their duty. Well, until that time I had thought the same thing, and of course there is truth in what she meant. But the question was a fair one. Granted that a man preaches out of a serious sense of his duty, cannot he enjoy his preaching? And granted that Christians have seen the evil of their sin, and have turned to Christ for salvation, is there nothing in that to make them bright faced enough to be noticeable? We ought to reveal in our very separateness that the Christian life is the kind men ought to live if they want to be manliest and happiest. A woman reporter was at my church the other day and in her account of the sermon she made me say that Christians ought to go and make other people miserable until they came to Christ. What I did say was not half so good as that, but that is a striking way of saying this same thing. If Christians are to win men by the joy of their lives, it must be by a real separation from the world in that very particular. If a grief utterly breaks a Christian down, and he weeps and wails and refuses to be comforted, where is the value of his faith? If reverses distract and unsettle a Christian, where is he different from

The happiest
life.

The Growing Church

men around? If hardships unman and unnerve a Christian so that he is unfitted for life, how shall the non-Christian be made to feel the power of faith? Unless he is different from others, what is his argument?

The church
as a protest.

Luke 13:21.

The Church of Christ in a community ought to be a perpetual protest. It is separated not for its own sake, but for the sake of the people around. It seeks to win them, not by isolation, but by separation. The figure of Jesus is always best. He uses leaven for illustration. He reminds us that He wants His followers to be like leaven in the meal. Leaven and meal are intermingled, but they are not the same. It is the hope of the leaven that the meal shall become like it, but it will be the despair of the meal if the leaven should instead become meal. The leaven is itself and is not meal, in hope that the meal may be transformed into the likeness which it brings to it. Christians are in the world and must be separate from the world, for the world's sake. It is pathetic beyond words, both for the world and for the church when the church becomes worldly, when it cannot be distinguished in principle and life and conduct from the world about it.

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An English medical officer said awhile ago that a single cleanly family raises the standard of cleanliness in a whole tenement, and that he has seen the removal of one such a family effect a deterioration all around. It ought to be so with a Christian life wherever it is lived. When, however, you can go into a circle of people, watching them day by day and find no difference among them, though there are some in the church and some not, it is because all are unconsciously Christians, or because the Christians have become worldly. The church does not grow as the kingdom of God while it is a secular, worldly institution.

As a matter of common experience, the church does grow by its separated members. Last week I heard a man tell the story of his conversion. It came about through his hearing the claim of two of his friends who had been with him in sin that they had turned from their sin and had become Christians. He did not believe it, and for one week he took a furlough from his office and watched them. Wherever he could observe what they were doing, he did it. They did not know it, but he dogged their steps as a seeking soul, to see

An instance
of the argu-
ment.

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if they had found something which he had not. As he told it, I wondered what might have come if they had become careless or indifferent. Suppose their lives had been the lives of men of the world, suppose they had defended themselves in things that are common, but not right, what would have been the outcome in the watcher's life? Is any man among us sure that he is not under watch? Is any man in the church ready to prove that some other man, dissatisfied with himself and his ways, is not watching him day by day whenever his life comes into view, in order to see whether there is anything in this Christian claim? There are such earnest souls. Let no man's impatience with quibblers, who use the faults of Christians as mere excuse, blind him to the fact that there are honest men who are watching the church in dead earnest to see if the claim of Christ is true.

In a little group of men, leaders in the church, I heard the question asked, "What is the weightiest argument in behalf of Christ today?" One of the wisest in the group replied after a moment's silence, "The weightiest argument for Christ, and the weightiest argu-

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ment against Christ today, is the same argument—Christians.” That is true. It is what Peter means in bidding us to walk carefully in daily life that we may put to silence the ignorance of men. It is what Jesus means when He calls us the lights of the world. 1 Peter 2:15.

And not alone in daily life; there are explicit things which the Christian profession demands in behalf of the world. It is part of the separation of the church that it declares its law of life to be the best there is, and therefore that it feels an interest in men with a poorer law of life. If it goes on living its own life, indifferent to the non-Christian lives all about it, it is evident that it has no passion for its own life. It cannot be too often emphasized that the church is an organization which does not exist for the sake of its own members, but for the sake of those who are on the outside. Other organizations, labor unions, employers' unions, lodges, fraternities, exist for the sake of their members. So does the church in a very secondary way. It is for the sake of its members, only that they may in it learn how to be effective in the service of men who are outside. Primarily it exists for those

The church exists for the sake of men outside.

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who are not its members. They come into it in their turn to reach out for others. Do you not recall your childhood game of "black-man?" One boy was on the catcher's side at first, and all the others tried to "run right through." He singled out his prey, and when he caught him, counted on him at once to help catch the others. There was no sitting on the base as though there were some peculiar merit just in being on that side. Instead, just as soon as he was caught, every boy became a catcher. That would be a capital church game. Every man caught, at once becoming a catcher—what a tremendous church force it would make! But that is the simplest ideal of the church of Christ. If, now, a member of a church settles down comfortably in it and lets the outside world get on as best it may without his influence or interest, he has manifestly missed the point of his membership. A growing church must be one whose members have and manifest a genuine care for their friends who are not of the church. When, instead, people can come to a church day after day, and the members are so concerned with each other and with their own affairs that the

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visiting people are neglected, there is sheer failure. That is not the way in which a church grows. I was much humiliated once when a gentleman said of a church of which I was pastor that it seemed a very cordial church—all the people who belonged there were so glad to see each other that they had no time to notice people who did not belong there. On the other hand, when the people of a church manifest an interest in their neighbors, seeing to it that they have such a welcome as a church of Christ should give, there is present one of the assurances of growth. It is a surprising fact that so many people have to be sought out by the church. It would seem the natural thing for men to flock to the church for their eternal interests. When, however, some of them do so, and find in the church only a partial or qualified welcome, you can see how easily they drift away from it. Our cities have in them thousands who give that as their excuse for neglect of the church. In their early days in the city, they turned to the church for fellowship and kindness, and could not break through the crust, so they have left it out of their calculations entirely. I am not excusing

The argu-
ment of
friendliness.

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them, such an excuse will not stand them in good hand in the presence of God whom they came to church to worship, but neither will it stand us in good hand that they should have expected nothing better.

The church has, thus, two perils, which seem opposites: it may so mingle with the world that it is no longer separate from the world; it may become so self-centered that it no longer seeks out the world for its salvation. They are twin perils and they must be avoided by constant watchfulness.

The Discomfiture of Hypocrites

V. THE DISCOMFITURE OF THE HYPOCRITES.

AN INTERESTING incident in the Ephesian Church brings to sight another element of its strength. It is that wherein the sons of Sceva the Jew sought to trade on the religion of Christ for their own gain, getting its form without its substance. Commanding the evil spirit to come forth, their hypocrisy was revealed and they were overmastered. We are told that the news of their discomfiture led many to magnify the name of the Lord Jesus. In the Revelation letter the Spirit underscores the spirit of the Ephesian church in this regard in three counts. He praises them that they cannot bear evil men. In one of his recent sermons Dr. Watkinson notes how God safeguards nature and human souls as well by an instinctive repugnance to hurtful things. The Ephesian church knew the nausea of wicked men, could not digest them, spewed them out. Secondly, he praises them that they sat in calm judgment on pretended apostles,

Acts 19:13-16.

Rev. 2:1-7.

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tried them, discovered their falseness and would have none of them. They refused to be blind followers of the blind. Then, thirdly, he notes their hatred of the works of the Nicolaitans and counts them wise in it. They had caught the hatred of God and copied it. As a woodland lake catches the blue of the sky and is blue and beautiful, and again reflects the black overhanging cloud and is dark and forbidding, so the Ephesian church knew both the love and the hatred of God. Nicolaitans were pretenders, false friends of the truth. Here are four items in the account of the church which we may sum up in the one phrase of the discomfiture of hypocrites.

There must be a great many people in the present church who are hypocrites. One learns it from the people outside who do not join the church because of them. Personally, I do not know these hypocrites in any worthy numbers, but that may be my good fortune. Indeed, I seem to know as many hypocrites outside who plead the inside hypocrites as a pretence to cover their real reason for not coming out plainly for Christ. It is a lame excuse at best. It reminds one of that striking charge of

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Elijah against the people of Israel that they were "limping between two sides." If a man honestly cares for Christ, what difference does it make to him that another man dishonestly pretends to care for Him? Let him come out, one side or the other, with no more limping. So long, however, as there are hypocrites, many or few, in the church, they are a peril and a weakness to it. 1 Kings 18:21.

A hypocrite, wherever you find him, is a despicable character and much to be condemned. It is specially so in religion. Dean Farrar tells that when the ancients wanted to offer a white ox on the altar of Jupiter, they would make a spotted ox pass for a white one by chalking over all the black marks. That is the dry rot of religion. It is hypocrisy run into folly, when the hypocrite goes beyond deceiving his fellows and plays on the credulity of God. Yet all hypocrisy in the church tends to the same folly.

It would not be at all surprising if there were a good many who pretended to be Christians for the sake of the gain they may receive. That is an unconscious but very pleasant testimonial to the Christian faith. Hypocrites are Hypocrisy a tribute to Christ.

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the devil's tribute to Christ. They mean that there are some distinct advantages about the gospel, advantages which men want and which they will gain without the cost of real faith if they can. They would sit on the right and left hand without being baptized with the baptism of Christ; then the places must be worth the having. Let us admit that there are hypocrites in the church of to-day—what shall the church do about them?

Difficult to
detect.

In the church or out of it hypocrisy is one of the hardest vices to detect. Going below the surface is always difficult. For one thing, we are ourselves creatures of moods. In a moment of wrath David once said, "All men are liars," but he did not mean it as a standing fact of all moods. There are times when our souls are so vexed with wrongs we have suffered that we are ready to suspect all men, but they are doubtful times, and they do not leave us in good mood to deal with honest men who surround us. It is difficult to deal with hypocrisy calmly or judicially. Specially is it of importance that we be clear-minded when we deal with religious hypocrisy, for an error may do untold damage. You must have

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had profound pity for the mother of Samuel, Hannah, where Eli so mistook her devotion as to charge her with drunkenness. Only a very real devotion could have endured it. I know a young man whose life was slowly coming out into value in Christian service who seemed driven back into religious reticence and inefficiency by a rash charge of insincerity made against him by one of those insinuating people who know all hearts but their own. We must needs see to it that it is not our own mood which leads us to find others hypocritical. 1 Sam. 1:14.

It is difficult to detect because of the chameleon forms it takes. No two cases of hypocrisy are alike. What would be hypocrisy in one man might be honesty in another. I have a friend who always smiles when he is deeply moved; that is, his face contorts with what would be a smile for others. You would count him amused at sufferings if you did not know his peculiarity. True religion shows itself very differently in different people. It would be sheer hypocrisy for me to use the language which to some other man would be an accurate statement of his condition. In some of the later devotional books I find experiences de-

Its many forms.

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scribed which seem to me so impossible as to be sheer affectations, and sometimes I find young people much distressed because they have no experiences to match the phrases. The first inclination is to judge these experiences by my own and call them extreme and manufactured, which means that the narrators are hypocrites. But they are honest as are we who have no such realistic experiences. They are simply different, that is all. The religious life is so individual, so peculiar to each person, that it is easy to mistake hypocrisy.

It is difficult to detect because of the depth of the religious life. It lies in strata. You may count the surface layer falsified by what you find next below it, but are you sure there is not another layer farther down? The King of Israel wore his robes outwardly and seemed almost indifferent to the suffering of his people, but when he rent his clothes they saw he was wearing sackcloth next his flesh. James IV. of Scotland took up arms against his father when only a lad, but he made his whole life an unseen penance, for under his robes he wore an iron belt, each year adding a link, that his repentance might be heavier each year. Have

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you seen the deeper life of the man whom you count a hypocrite? May he not be a weak man struggling in his better self against the very sin you see in him?

Wherever you hear the opinion that the church ought to cast out hypocrites, you will find it fair to ask how it shall be done. You may be morally certain that a member is a hypocrite, but have you ever tried to get evidence of it? It is told of one of our early American evangelists that in the course of an address he made the broad statement that all infidels are fools and that he could prove it in any given case in ten minutes. A man in the audience asked if he might interrupt, and remarked that he must take exception to the statement, since he was himself an infidel and thought he was no fool. The preacher looked him over rather curiously and said, "So you are an infidel? Will you tell me just how much of an infidel?" "Certainly, sir; I deny that there is anything at all in religion." "Nothing at all in religion? Are you willing to go record as saying that?" "Go on record?" the infidel replied, "Why, I have been writing and lecturing against religion for these twenty

How shall
hypocrites'
be punished?

Heroic
treatment.

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years." The evangelist glanced at his watch and said, "Well, I said I could prove an infidel a fool in ten minutes, and I have seven minutes left. I'll leave it to the audience if a man isn't a fool to write and lecture for twenty years against a thing that has nothing whatever in it!" Now, that is heroic treatment of hypocrisy that is proud of itself, that says what it does not mean because what it does mean would not sound so well. But I need hardly ask if it is convincing treatment and if it might not leave a bitterness in the heart of a man who was honest in spite of his peculiar notions. At any rate, you cannot trap a hypocrite so easily in common life.

Shall they
be disci-
plined?

Some, mostly outsiders, would have the church proceed to discipline all hypocrites, excising them from its membership. It is easy to say—the very nature of hypocrisy makes it virtually impossible to do. A prominent Presbyterian leader has recently declared that the church is done with heresy trials. Doubtless the wish is father to the thought, and the wish is the prayer of many of us. Heresy trials tear men's hearts and leave scars whose pain is long in dying away. Their gains

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are so hard to discover that we will all welcome the day of the last trial. If they should ever become a sad necessity, God make His church brave and wise and always loving, finding the greatest heresy not in a wrong head but in a wrong heart!

But you can find heresy; it gets out, there it is in black and white; once you understand it you know what to say of it. Not so with hypocrisy. Always there are other words to say than you have yet heard; you are moving in the dark; you are judging; you are trusting your opinions. No, you cannot discipline hypocrisy even if you ought to.

Indeed, the only safe way to bring hypocrites to discomfiture is to let them betray themselves. No espionage is endurable. There is but one way to bring it about—the church can be made so honest and so deeply spiritual that a hypocrite cannot endure it. There are few more pitiable things than a man who has caught the forms of godliness, who knows the phrases of religion, who can talk religious talk, but who ends there—such an one in the midst of a company of earnest, eager, deep-souled Christian men as they go down into the truth

The self-punishment of hypocrites.

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of the Gospel. Bring such a man into the atmosphere of real devotion, and he must betray himself. Sometimes, thank God, he is nobly dissatisfied with himself and becomes honestly a Christian. In any case, he is revealed. Such a man needs to be set to some of the work of the kingdom of God, needs to be sent to cast out some of the devils of the present day, to find how little such devils recognize sham godliness. One reason hypocrisy is so possible in the church of to-day is that its enterprises do not put heavy and long strain on the godliness of its members, revealing falsity. Emerson thinks there is no cave in all the world to hide a rogue. But a lifeless, inactive, undemanding church is a great refuge for sham Christians. Whenever the church or any of its members finds that the evils which it combats do not disappear, that the devils whom it calls out do not come forth, the question at once arises whether the church has not more of the form of godliness than of godliness itself. When the experts are testing opium for commerce, they pour a certain liquid into the specimen, a liquid against which the drug will at once set to work. If

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it is pure, it will win against it; if it is adulterated, it will disintegrate and go to pieces in presence of it. Let the church get down to solid, straining, spiritual effort, let it test its members on some thoroughly Christian work, and its hypocrites will be revealed and their revelation will be their correction. I remember a striking paragraph in Professor Seth's Ethical Principles in which he declares that the lesson of the book of Ecclesiastes is the lesson of work, the lesson that in activity, in deeds, lies man's real hope. He calls it Carlyle's lesson and illustrates it with the cases of Esau, of Tito in George Eliot's *Romola*, of Stevenson's *Markheim*, of Calibar in *The Tempest*. But is it not the lesson of the whole book of God and the whole book of life? Surely it is the deeper meaning of the word of Jesus: "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Let us watch any man set to do the work which calls for spiritual power, not for mere shrewdness and energy and ingenuity, but for real spiritual power, and we shall know him for honest or hypocrite.

John 7:7.

The discomfiture of hypocrites will come

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about through no process of discipline, the condition is too subtle for that; it will come about through the creation of an atmosphere in the church which will make the dishonest man wretched and will lead him to expose himself. It will come about through the undertaking of tasks worthy of the strength which the church claims. It is in presence of the tasks of the church that hypocrisy reveals its feebleness. If all the people of the church undertook its work, and tried to cast out the demons that are in the world, it would soon be known who have the power of religion and who have only its form. An aggressive, spiritual church, busy with souls, is no refuge for hypocrites.

The Changed Lives of the Converts

VI. THE CHANGED LIVES OF THE CONVERTS.

WE HAVE already noted the fact of the separation of the church from the world as an essential in its growth. Beside it we must now place another fact of the Ephesian church which helps to explain its growth, namely, the effect which the gospel had on the converts. They became different not only from the world, but also from their former selves. The account says they came in large numbers and confessed and showed their deeds. Some who had practiced sorcery and witchcraft came and told the charms which they had used and in presence of the people burned their books and their charms. When the gospel took hold on them, it made a difference with them. You knew they were different by two facts: they were ready to come out publicly for the new faith, and they were willing to give up a great deal in its behalf. There is always reason to question the entire loyalty of a believer when you find him wanting to re- Acts 19:18.

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A cheap
loyalty.

ceive his salvation at as little cost as possible. A few months ago a young woman talked to me about coming into my church, saying, "I wouldn't join such-and-such a church; it's too strict; but your church lets people dance, doesn't it?" I doubt if I made it clear to her that the great question is not what the Christian can still do for the world, but what he can do for his cross-bearing Master. Her heart was set on a following which should cost her nothing. There is room, also, to question the heartiness of the faith of a believer who talks very much about the possibility of being a Christian outside the church. Of course it is possible, but is it fair? Was the Master secretly crucified? Did He slip through life with no public bearing of the sin load? If the saved soul had a passion for its Savior, it would cry out for chance to declare its allegiance.

A man made
new.

Three generations ago a young Jew named Mendel was living in Germany. He became a Christian, and the truth of Christ came to him with such transforming effect that he took a new name at his baptism and called himself Neander, which means, "a new man," and by this name he is known as the great church

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historian. Such an effect the gospel is meant to have on all who accept it; it claims the power to make new men of them. If it does not do so, then it loses its best argument, and the church loses its best evidence. A church not separated from the world is weak argument; a Christian not changed from his old self is poor testimony to Christ.

This effect of the gospel on its believers is the great explanation of its growth in all the centuries. You have doubtless seen Charles Loring Brace's book, "Gesta Christi," the Triumphs of Christ, in which he has made a study of the contacts of the gospel with early paganism, or Uhlhorn's heavier work on "The Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism." Or you will recall the fuller and more interesting work of Dr. Storrs, "The Divine Origin of Christianity as Indicated by Its Historical Effects." Its eight strong chapters almost cover the field. He points out these eight effects of Christianity: It brought first, a new conception of God; second, a new conception of man; third, a new principle of the duty of man to God; fourth, a new principle of the duty of man to man, with fifth, a new

The explanation of growth.

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teaching of the duty of nations to each other; it has had a constantly inspiring effect, sixth, on the mental culture of mankind; seventh, on the moral culture of mankind and eighth, on the world's hope of progress. It is a safe and strong argument; there is no answer to it. The very men who tend to minimize the power of Christ are products of the influences which He has inspired.

There are grave defects yet in the result; it is the weakness of the present argument that we are so far from a completed civilization. But it is fairer to compare the world that was with the world that is than to compare the world that is with the world that ought to be. By that fairer standard, the gospel will stand the test. Ask how far the race has been brought on, rather than how far it has yet to go.

The incident at Ephesus suggests three great changes that have been made in the broad domain of human thought. First, As with those sooth-sayers, so with men since, the faith of Christ has given men a sense of mastery of the world, rather than of truculence to it. There are no powers in the world about us that need

The first
marked
change.

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to be placated, there are no influences which we must fend off with some charm. The superstitions of the day are our shame and we know it; none of us who feels their influence who is not ashamed of it. From all that bondage to fear the gospel of Christ has come to free us. We realize that not all people know that. The mediums and witches and soothsayers of the present day live and thrive. Otherwise intelligent people speak with hushed tone of some strange foretelling and declare they do not know what to make of it. Frequently a new medium appears and our superstitious men and women run to sit at her feet and wait her word. It is large sport for the medium and it is amusing to others. Thus we reveal that we have not yet outgrown our heathenism, that we have not yet come to trust the presence of a Father with whom the future is safe without our seeing it. But all that is against the spirit of Christ. It is His hope that we will outgrow all of it and come into the life of courage and freedom.

Secondly, The story suggests that the gospel magnifies the open life rather than the secretive one. There are no inner secrets of life which

The second
change.

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Matt. 10:27.

a few may know but which most may not know. The truth of God lies open to us all. There were times when Jesus took His disciples aside and told them great truths of the Kingdom, but He said to them, "What ye hear in the ear, proclaim upon the housetops." He had it in mind that His disciples should know the secret place that they might lead all men to it. There is one scene in George Ebers' *Uarda* which comes to mind when one speaks of this. It is that wherein the young priest is taken severely to task for having told to a common, uninitiated audience some of the things that belonged only to the inner circle of priests. It is a typical scene of the times. There were some large truths which the mass of people might hope to know. There were other truths which the new and untrained priest might learn, but the inner secrets of religion and of life were left for the initiated and could not be revealed to the mass of men. Over against such teaching Jesus sets His hope that men everywhere should seek to know the deepest secrets of His truth. There is no aristocracy in religion, save the aristocracy of humility. Every man may know and be all

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that any other man may know or be. God has no favorite friends except those who make Him their favorite friend. I may not look upon my brother and say, "It is granted to him to enter into the holies and commune with God, but it is not for me." The truth of Christ is not hid, to be learned from a chosen few. Claims of power to read the future in any way that is not open to every Christian are not only untrue, they are un-Christian. We are in no case reduced to the necessity of explaining them on any such grounds as superior revelations and occult powers. It is one of the marvels of the day that when we are so proud of our science, we should still be in the heyday of superstition and the reign of the occult. The teaching of Christ builds a fire for all dream books and secret symbols. It sets a premium on the open life, the life that is for all.

Thirdly, The story suggests a more familiar change in thought, magnifying the life of service over the life of gain. It has brought us to feel that our fellows do not exist for our sakes, but that we exist for their sakes. That is a revolution not yet completed. The con-

A more
familiar
change.

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verts at Ephesus learned that if they did know something that others did not know, they had been taught it for the sake of those others. David Harum was right in saying that it is a principle of much present life to find out what the other fellow means to do to you and to do it to him first. The change wrought by the teaching of Jesus is that we become servants of the need of others. We have no powers that we may treasure and use for our own benefit, exploiting others. In the case of Service vs. Self-seeking, Jesus appears for the plaintiff.

Such
changes are
necessary.

It is such changes as these that the gospel of Christ accomplishes in the large way. They are changes which it seeks to accomplish in personal life. A growing church will be one whose members are thus changed. They will be turned from dishonest practices, from frauds however piously perpetrated, from practices which bring the cause of religion into disrepute. If Christ cannot change the lives of His followers, if He cannot give them new and better principles of living, then His church cannot hope to grow. A little while ago I heard Dr. Chapman tell of a visit to St. Mark's

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in Venice, where he noticed the alabaster pillars beside the great altar. They were dull and lifeless—strange they should be there. The guide took a lighted taper and held it before one of the pillars. Then its beauty appeared, color radiated from it and filled a great circle with light. All that happened was that light had fallen on its dullness and it had answered with light. No less thing than that is planned by Jesus Christ for His followers. No less thing, a vastly greater thing. The change He works is not upon them, but within them. He would make the King's daughters and sons all glorious within. He would not shine on us as the taper ray falls on alabaster; He would be a blaze of glory in our lives that shall transform them throughout. Some one tells of a countryman going into the capital at Albany and hearing it said that certain columns were Scotch granite. He tapped them thoughtfully. "Scotch granite," he said, "is it polished that way clean through?" A Christian ought to be changed clean through; in the secret life, in the open life, in the whole life.

It is common to find the name of Jesus linked with those of great reformers as though

Psalms 45:13.

Christ's
method of
changing
men.

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He were one among them. Emerson names Him so sometimes. But He claims and has gained a higher place. He does not lead men from without. He makes them new from within. This He seeks to do with all the people who profess His name. He would make a strong church out of them by using their changed lives. There is an old legend that an innocent life must be walled up in the foundation of any building that is meant to endure. Professor Paulsen thinks the innocent life of Christ in the very foundation of the church is its hope for permanence. Well, it is the lives of its members changed toward holiness that are the mark of its growth to-day. Let the preaching be eloquence and earnestness itself, let the church be separated from the world, let the hypocrites all be disclosed, if there be not constantly more men and women coming into it, changed by the power of God, then the church cannot grow. If men come into the church, and are not changed from what they would be without the power of Christ, then the church cannot prove its right to be. The changes are not reserved for the ministry or for peculiarly constituted people. There is

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no unworthy habit to which a man must yield. There is no sin which is so inwrought into his fibre that it cannot be taken out. There is no man who cannot become godly, utterly made over from the old life into the new.

Moreover, we are not yet the power in the growing church which we may be until we are so changed. A dishonest Christian, a Christian impure or rough in speech, a frivolous, unreliable Christian, a selfish Christian, a hard-handed Christian—read the phrases and see how they jar on the ear. The adjective and the noun will not connect. In so far as the adjective fits us, so far we do not fit the noun. But the change of our lives is not simply in such details. The whole life gets transformed. It was the right spirit that made a man speak of himself as one whose business was the serving of the Kingdom of God, and who sold groceries to pay the bills. That is the changed attitude toward life. It makes it honorable to make money, for thus the purpose of God is served and His Kingdom advanced. It makes it noble to teach, to work, to think, to do anything, because everything can be fitted into the place of service.

The contradiction of the unchanged life.

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The four
rules of life.

Gen. 4:9.

Matt. 27:4.

Matt. 26:14.

Luke 6:31.

Luke 22:27.

There are but four great rules of life, found everywhere and marking grades of men. There is, first, the Wooden Rule—the rule of Cain: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”—the rule of the priests: “What is that to us? See thou to that;”—the rule of indifference to others, under which life centers on self, and self cares no more for others than the floor cares for the agony of the man who has fallen on it. There is, secondly, the Brazen Rule—the rule of Judas: “What will you give me, and I will betray Him unto you,”—the rule under which others are exploited for self’s sake, which regards others only so far as they may serve self. Then, immeasurably above them, is, thirdly, the Golden Rule: “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise,”—a rule given by the Master Himself, not as a final rule for life, more than many others He gave, and not the rule of His own life, a rule wherein the self and its desires are still the standard, but so far beyond the common law of life that the world will be a glad place when we all obey it. Finally there is the Diamond Rule,—the rule of the life of Christ: “I am among you as He that serveth,”—the rule of

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service, under which the self is no longer standard, under which others are thought of as the field for the outlay of strength, under which the soul looks up to God to find His will and delights to do it. We are here not to be ministered unto but to minister. The gospel of Christ would change our lives from the lowest to the highest rule, would bring us out of wood and brass and even gold and set us in the treasury of God as very diamonds. Every life so changed provides strength for the growing church. Tertullian explains the peculiar spread of the Christian faith in his day by saying of the Christians: "They alone live blameless lives." Such lives will make the church irresistible in our own day.

Is it not the change into the likeness of Christ that we mean? You remember Queen Bellicent's account of the crowning of Arthur, how the knights of the Round Table knelt before him and were bound by such strait vows to himself that they rose, some pale, some flushed, some dazed as though they had seen a ghost, but when Arthur spoke to them in large, divine and comfortable words, how she beheld

The result
of the
changed life

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"From eye to eye through all their Order flash
A momentary likeness of the King."

But it was not momentary. It became fixed in the faces of all those who were worthy their place at the Round Table. When Knight Percivale went in quest of the Holy Grail and came upon the monk Ambrosius who had never known the world, nor strayed without the pale of the great yew tree beside his home, the monk knew him, saying:

" But thee
When first thou camest—such a courtesy
Spake through the limbs and in the voice—
I knew
For one of those who eat in Arthur's hall:
For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,
Some true, some light, but every one of you
Stamped with the image of the King."

All the followers of our Christ have momentary likeness to Him, let us believe it of ourselves, but sometimes it seems to fade away. Shall we not lay ourselves open to Him to be stamped with His image, changed by fellowship with Him from our former selves, that we may carry His likeness in a new self? So we shall be imitators of God, as dear children.

Eph. 5:1.

VII. SOME HINTS OF METHOD.

CERTAIN incidental expressions in the account of the Ephesian Church come illuminatingly to our minds, throwing light on the method of the successful work.

I.

The content of the preaching by which the church grew has already been noted. It is interesting to note the method of it. Paul reminded the elders that he had preached publicly and from house to house. He says he went about among them all preaching the Kingdom. That means a great deal. The public part of the preaching is familiar and quite common, until you join with it the phrase: went about among you all. There is more in it than personal work, about which something needs be said. There is the going with the message into public places where people were. There are men who come to hear the gospel. There are other men who hear the gospel only when it comes to them.

The method
of the
preaching.

Acts 20:20-25.

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Preaching
in public
places.

In recent years there has been a revival of the public preaching by going to men. In the great cities, almost any summer night, you will find pastors, with groups of people from their churches, preaching on street corners or in parks. The services are different from those of the Salvation Army in that they are frankly held in the name of the church, and bring assurance to men on the street that the churches are concerned about them. They accent the fact that the churches do not exist for the sake of their members, but for the sake of those who are outside.

Three ob-
jections.

Some do not like the method. They fear it is imperiling the dignity and value of the gospel. One of my friends said to me: "The Lord save me from a bass-drum religion!" Well, the Lord save me from that and also from a band-box religion. There is a religion somewhere between the bass-drum and the band-box which will be about right. It is a religion which makes us welcome all those who come to the gospel message, but sends us out with the gospel message to those who will not come.

Some of the brethren object to street-corner preaching, because they feel they are not

Some Hints of Method

adapted to it. They shrink from it. What do they ordinarily say to a man who shrinks from uniting with the church because he dreads the publicity, the standing before people? What do they say to the man who does not feel adapted to teaching a Sunday School class, or doing any distinctive work for Christ? Doubtless in some cases they find the reasons good. In most cases, I am sure, they point out that if it is needed work, grace will be given for it, and that with the attempt at service will come fitness and pleasure. My friend, Dr. Merrill, of the Sixth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, and a group of young people from that church and my own, will remember the evening a few years ago when we sat singing and waiting the signal for going out for our first street meeting. Dr. Merrill was to speak, and I was fairly ashamed of being so glad that I was not to speak. We owned up, he did and I did verbally, and the young people did in their faces, that we were not quite sure how we would come out. But after that first meeting I think we were all done with that feeling. A great crowd, attentive, respectful, even sympathetic, always greeted us, and we learned to love the service.

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That is a common testimony. But suppose it were not? May it not be a duty still? Suppose in one summer campaign a man only learned to say the simple gospel in a way to hold a street company, that would be worth the work. His winter preaching would be better for it.

Some object to street meetings that they do not bring results. What results? Conversions? But they do bring such results in many cases. One reason we do not know more of such results is that we do not follow them up. We hold our meeting and go home with no personal endeavor, and no clinching the matter with men. But there are results which repay the work without conversions. It is a great thing to remind a church that the gospel is portable and is meant to be taken to people. The inner effect of outdoor meetings is tremendous. And it is a good thing to remind the outside man that the churches are after him, not simply glad to have him come. Often he pretends to think the churches are exclusive, and that he would have no welcome if he came to them. Such meetings must make him realize that the churches are more than waiting for

Some Hints of Method

him; they are seeking him. All this, even if he does not accept Christ, nor even come to church. In many cases he will do both. And after all, are we right sure that "results" are the main thing?

House to house preaching corresponded in part, at least, to our personal work. Dr. Trumbull's little book on Individual Work for Individuals has said most that need be said on that subject for those who have read it. It meets all the common objections of lack of time and adaptation and success and propriety and brings the matter squarely down to each man. I asked a young man once to read the book. He declined, saying: "I understand it makes everyone feel that he can and ought to do personal work, and I do not want to do it." He is not the only one whose "cannot" means "will not." For many church members the present meaning of "from house to house" is "from store to store," "from customer to customer," "from friend to friend." It means a portable religion which is aggressive beyond the public domain.

The pastor's part of this personal work is much more difficult than most laymen suppose. So-called "pastoral calling" has much degener-

House to
house work.

Pastoral
calling.

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ated in our day. One of my brethren calls it "gadding." Every pastor knows how easy it is to leave a house after a call, feeling that no spiritual impression has been left; one has made a social call, that is the whole of it. But, of course, that is not pastoral calling. The story is told of a Brooklyn pastor that when he went to his present church he announced his purpose with reference to pastoral calling. He said: "My idea of a pastoral call is that the pastor shall take an elder with him to a home, and there assemble all the family, the father remaining at home, of course, interrogate them on their spiritual condition, counsel them as to their conduct and lead them in worship. If now, any of you desire such a call, kindly let me know, and I will come." He has not been called upon to go. Of course, that is extreme. On the other hand, another brother is much elated with the fact that he can make twenty or twenty-five calls in a half day. I doubt if Paul's house to house work was done in either fashion. It was rather the carrying of the gospel into homes, it was the bringing of a spiritual influence into the houses. A minister is in poor business when he becomes a mere social

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visitor. He may read the Bible and pray in a house or he may not, but he must speak and live and visit in that home for the sake of the spiritual life or he has not made a pastoral call. It may be a call to make acquaintance, but the acquaintance is sought frankly for the sake of the man's soul. After a discussion with a fellow-minister on the respective values of pulpit and parish work, I met a well-known elder on the street and asked him whether he would prefer a pastor who was a good preacher at the cost of the parish calling, or one who called generously even at the cost of his preaching. He said, "Neither; I want my pastor to be a constant spiritual influence in my life. I want to feel when I have touched him that power has come to me, and I have been charged anew to meet the materializing influences under which I live all the week." "A constant spiritual influence," that is the value of pastoral calling.

And there ought to be a vast amount more of it for the sake of explicit soul-winning. In a conference, a few months ago, a pastor confessed that his weeks often passed with no such hand-to-hand effort. He wanted men saved

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and preached for it, but he did not go out to grapple with men one by one in hope of winning them to Christ. Many of us might make a similar confession. We are interested in sinners, but not in a sinner. Partly it is because we already have so much to do, and we do not realize how the personal work would inspire the mass work. Partly we do not know to whom to speak, and we neglect the ones nearest to us. Partly we do not feel adapted to it, and we fail to learn how from doing the work. Whatever hinders our doing house-to-house soul-winning, we are denying the church one of its best means of growth.

Learning
how by do-
ing the work.

Here again, be sure that the house-to-house work was not left to Paul. Surprising how the first knowledge of Jesus led men to tell each other. I asked a man once to go and speak to another in behalf of Christ. "Oh, I can't," he said, "I have just become a Christian myself." But it was on the very day after he found Jesus for himself that Andrew found Simon for Jesus and Philip found Nathaniel. As soon as Anna heard that the Savior had come, she went about to tell all whom she knew. If personal work meant philosophical

John 1:41, 45.

Luke 2:38.

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argument or logical discussion, it might call for a course of study before it is undertaken. No one can be too well trained, be clear on that. Courses in personal work are admirable. Only, let it be very clear that the best course in personal work is personal work. A young Christian will learn more about how to approach men in behalf of Christ by approaching a few ignorantly than from a course of lectures. But he is afraid he "will make mistakes." Likely he will. But he will do no eternal damage if his heart is right. Trust the leading and overruling of the Master for that.

One of our secular papers, one of the cheapest of them, recently contained an excellent editorial on the element of personal work in church growth. It was good, because it was based on incidents in the life and work of Jesus. It reminded us how He went after men in their places of abode, going from town to town. The closing paragraph said: "And so, while the churches are barely holding their own, what body of Christians is leaping forward, commanding the attention of all men? The Salvation Army. Say what you will of its method, it has at least this merit—it goes

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after the man, instead of waiting for the man to come." Let us not contend about the churches barely holding their own, but let us agree with this, that the church of to-day needs to go about among men with the gospel both publicly and from house to house, to gain full growth.

II.

The problem
of leader-
ship.

Acts 18:20.

Acts 19:10.

Acts 20:17.

Acts 18:24-28.

There is an almost pathetic touch in the account of the struggle of the Ephesian church to secure better workers and its brave use of such as it had. Of course, it wanted Paul. He founded the church and though the people sought him to stay, he soon felt that he must go on. Later he spent two years with them. On his final journey to Jerusalem, he avoided coming purposely. Meanwhile they had Aquila and Priscilla and the brilliant Apollos. As for the latter, he came to them poorly trained, only half informed of the truth of the gospel, with the merit of readiness to learn. But every one knows the peril of half truths in the mouth of a popular leader. Everyone knows the damage to a church under

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the teaching of a man who does not know the greatest verities. Many a church explains its poor work by the poor leader it has. The pastor is not a spiritual man, or he is not a popular man, or he is sensational, or he is dry—this or that, he is not the leader the church wants. Half-trained leaders disgust other men. Ungrammatical Moodys are bid to sit down in meetings. Young people are told not to air their notions in public. They are assured that more harm than good comes from half-baked opinions. There is good history to sustain the fear. Heresies are one-sided truths. Fail of the vision of the full-orbed truth and you have a fad or a new sect. God save us from more!

The growing church to-day has the same problem of leadership that confronted the Ephesian church. There are a few Pauls—men whom everybody wants, men in demand. If each church could have one, it would be much better off and the kingdom would hasten. There are occasional Aquilas and Priscillas, God be thanked, never conspicuous, but thoroughly reliable, informed, patient with the half-trained and able to sustain a steady pace of work. But are there not more of the Apol-

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los type, possibly without his eloquence, but with his half-vision? It is much if they have his zeal, much if they magnify the half-truth which they know. Still, Carlyle was right in saying, "To teach religion, the first thing needful and also the last and only thing, is to find a man who has religion." You will never draw water out of an empty well. You will never learn from a man's teaching what the man does not know. Half-vision is always half-blindness. The half that the modern Apollos does not see may not be the same to which the Ephesian church was blind. It is generally the richer, better part of the truth, be sure of that. He may see the need of man, but not the hope for them. He may see their sin without their struggle. He may realize his own strength, but not his weakness. He may be efficient in the pulpit and a failure outside it. He may be a pastor par excellence, but a stick of a preacher. He may be a good man, but without any sense. Or, worst of all, he may be carried away with eloquence, or society, or intellectuality, and cold to the Spirit of God.

Well, suppose a church has such a leader. The first thought of some is to get rid of him.

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They think he might fit somewhere else, and they would like to pass him on. Or suppose such a leader, half educated, half trained, appears among the young people or anywhere in the church. Some would silence him, put him down, "teach him his place." It would all be done most kindly if possible, but firmly and in the interest of the church. That might have been done with Apollos. Error plus eloquence is very dangerous. Silence Apollos, then.

Aquila shows us a more excellent way. Why not save Apollos for the church and make him efficient? If he is a young fellow, leading awkwardly and bunglingly, but earnest and eager, the church needs him sorely, not half-baked, but gradually and carefully trained. If he is a half-blind pastor, he also is needed. The popular notion is that a minister comes to a church already trained. It is a large mistake. The prophetic word is commonly quoted: "Like priest, like people," when the prophet said, "Like people, like priest." The influence of a minister on a church is unmistakable, but the church makes the minister in even larger sense. I heard one minister say: "Let me know a church well and I will

Making a
new leader
out of the
old one.

Hosea 4:2.

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tell you what kind of pastors it has had." Another replied, "Let me know a minister well, and I will tell you what kind of churches he has had." I could not tell either, but the latter said as large a thing as the former. I wish it were wise to give the name of a much loved and well known pastor whose long service in his present church began with failure and distrust. The wisest of his people came together after the first year, and faced their mistake in calling him. Manifestly he was not the man for the place, for their church was "peculiar," as all churches are; the only thing now was to secure a call for him elsewhere as quietly and gracefully as possible. But some one said, "Are we so sure he will fail? Have we done our part? Let us rally to him. Let us pray for him, let us see his good qualities first and most; let us talk him up, but let us pray him up." To that they agreed, and twenty-five years of happy pastorate have followed. His friends say the change is greatest in himself. The judgment of the church was correct, but they changed the man.

I do not forget that there are incorrigibles. The wise man found men in his own day who

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would not be separated from their folly, Prov. 27:22.
though you pounded them in a mortar with a pestle. There may be such men now. All men are not so. There are men failing in church leadership to-day because their church will not pray them into efficiency. They do not do better because they do not know better. No one expounds to them the more perfect way. That can be badly done, and there are men who receive instruction badly, but the failure on either side is not common. Most men can be trained, and any church can reform any good man. Part of the restlessness in the ministry is prayerlessness in the people. Wanting better leaders, they think the only way is to get another leader, when they might make a new man out of the one they have. If, therefore, my brother in the pew, you feel that your pastor or your superintendent is unqualified for his place, ask very seriously whether you are doing your share to qualify him. Instead of seeking a new leader, might you not make a new one. In your own quiet way, be Aquila to your Apollos.

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III.

The need of
staying qual-
ity.

Rev. 2:1-7.

Four times in the Revelation letter, the Spirit commends in the Ephesian Church its steadiness and persistence. He speaks of its toil, twice of its steadfastness, recalls that it was ready to bear for His sake, and that it did not grow weary. Its service was not spasmodic. It had a sanctified doggedness that saved it from the strain of the splurge and the shame of the re-action. Such a quality entered largely into its growth.

A most needed quality. Have you not become suspicious of plans of work exploited in the papers and lauded as accomplishing great events? You read on anxiously to see how long these elaborate schemes have worked. "Inaugurated last February"—ah, you will wait to try it. "Already in operation six months"—well, six months is not long. In an educational meeting in Chicago last winter a revolutionary outline of study was presented by a western educator, who assured the hearers that it was in successful operation in his own university. I learned afterwards that when he

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had spoken, certain difficulties in the long working of the plan were at once pointed out. He assured the critics that they had encountered none of them. "How long has the plan been in use?" was asked. "About three months," was the reply, and everybody laughed outright. The difficulties were not due yet. An old pastor said to me once that he never felt like telling anyone else about a plan of work until he had tried it at least three years. All brethren do not feel so. Some are eager even to announce what they still intend to do.

Then there are men who wear out in about four years. They are good for a short run, which they make at good speed, going to pieces at the end of it. They are not good for the long pull. A farmer uncle met my youthful commendation of a frisky, enthusiastic horse by bidding me wait until the end of the ten-mile journey. I noted that the other horse did the principal pulling the latter half of the way. It is a rare horse that can pull frolicsomenely for ten miles. Less frolic and more pull at the beginning is safe. This same uncle once said of a certain preacher that his "barrel" was just two years deep, and after that you

Men who
wear out.

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struck water. Some readers are learning to distrust items to the effect that the congregations have doubled in six months and the prayer meetings are the largest ever had, and so on and so on. They rejoice in six months of good, of course, but they ask about the staying power of the good. Is it a steady light or a flash?

The failure
churches.

So are there churches and church methods that wear out. Given a new pastor and they seek to kill him with kindness. They love him to death—but he had better die early. Or there comes a great and gracious outpouring of the Spirit. A whole community is roused and numbers are brought to Christ and into the church. After the meetings close, the people let go, interest dies down and wiseacres shake their heads and say, “We never did believe in these spasmodic revivals anyway!” A great gift of God, meant to enrich the church, is allowed to slip through its fingers for sheer lack of steadfastness and readiness to endure the grind of toil. After the meetings is the time for patient work, for training, for harvesting of results, for assimilating the new life to the church. At that point lies one weakness of many

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a church. It can meet an emergency; it is not ready to settle down to the grind. It wants large results but it will not be long-suffering in gaining them nor in using them. Adam Bede liked "to read about Moses because he carried a hard business well through." Thomas Paine published his paper, "The Crisis," during the early years of American life, hoping to help his fellow citizens to meet the nation's peril. When the treaty between England and the United States was announced, he ceased the issuing of the paper, saying, "The times that tried men's souls are over." But it is at just that point in the history that John Fiske dates the beginning of the "Critical Period in the History of the United States." The announcement of the treaty was the beginning of the real crisis, not the ending of it. Many churches begin their rest when the time for work has just come. It is not the spasmodic heroic efforts that measure churches best, but their power to get their shoulders under the commonplace burden and walk on and on with it. The real strength of a church is seldom anything that people think it worth while to tell about. It may be strong

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in organization and in sociability and in equipment. Back of all that must be patience, steadfastness, readiness to bear without growing weary. It has been said many times that Jesus showed His true self most of all in settling down cheerily to a hopeless task. You know what is meant by it. The church of Christ has no hopeless task, yet its great task is not to be accomplished with a splurge or a spasm. Its load will not be pulled up the heights by jerks and plunges. Novel methods and new appliances, fresh schemes and attractive plans have their place, but over and above all must be that patient steadfastness which comes of faith in Him who endured the cross not in one supreme hour alone, but through His whole sacrificial life.

These lines are written in a log cabin in the pine woods. The outlook is on a beautiful lake, fringed with birch and pines. The wind is blowing and the alder bushes and white birch trees are dancing and fluttering, making a constant rustle. The water is roughened and darkened in the breeze. But the great Norway pines that have overlooked the lake these two hundred years hardly sway in the wind,

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and send down no light sound, but only a deep undertone of music which seems to have in it the strength and majesty of their patient watching over these little things of yesterday. At their feet many men, many shrubs have claimed notice, have boasted their might, have lived their lives and passed away. The pines reach on up toward the heavens and strike roots deeper, decade after decade, until they stand double and treble centenarians, doing the will of God. And we, lying at their feet, look up through their evergreen tops and seek to learn their lesson while we pray our God, whose sentinels they are, to make us and our people steadfast, patient, toilsome, ready to bear, never weary until we come home to the coronation of the faithful.

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VIII. THE PERILS AND SAFEGUARDS.

PERIL is part of the reason of the church. It is placed in the world exactly because, of the things that endanger it. And yet the gravest perils of the church are not necessary to it, not the explanation of its being. In his farewell to the elders of the Ephesian church, Paul warns them of two lines of attack. There will be grievous wolves seeking to tear the flock—danger from without; there will be traitorous, unsubmissive, perverse ones rising among themselves—danger from within. Later in its history, the Spirit rebukes the church for loss of its early zeal. It has left its early passion of love. The humdrum of faith has settled upon it. From these there issues the greatest of all perils, divine retribution, the withdrawal of light-giving power, withdrawal of privilege by act of God Himself. Four lines of peril there are: attacks from without, attacks from within, loss of zeal, divine retribution. Their seriousness deepens from the first to the fourth.

Acts 20:29, 30.

Rev. 2:4.

Rev. 2:5.

The Perils and Safeguards

I.

The least thing the church has to dread is the attacks upon it by its enemies. It was from Dr. John Hall that I first heard the old story of the serpent that vented its rage upon a file by gnawing it with its teeth, rejoicing at the little heap of chips which it noticed after each attack, until it saw blood among them and found it was its own blood, the chips the filings of its own teeth. The file was unhurt. In logic, in philosophy, in intellectual combat, the wise men of the church may be safely pitted against the opponents. It is not the romancing of a lover that makes us declare that the intellect of Christendom is with the church—not all of it, but an undue proportion. Attacks that have taken the form of violence have brought the church new life. The blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church.

Attacks
from with-
out.

All that is true of the church at large and as a whole. But such attacks often work havoc with individual church-men. No storm ever wrecks a forest, but almost any storm will lay

Their in-
jury to indi-
viduals.

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low a few trees in the forest, weaker, feebler, susceptible trees. The outer foes of the church may not, therefore, be passed without notice by any growing church. The saloon, the brothel, the wrong commercial system, the false theory of the universe, the atheistic scientific system, the specious ethical philosophy—the enemies vary so that it seems almost unfair to list them together. But all are outside enemies which endanger the church. Give any one of them full swing, and the church suffers. They are like grievous wolves that enter in, and they do not spare the flock. Amazing how many of our churches sit idle in presence of these threatening dangers. We fulminate against errors in doctrines of which many of our people have never heard, while we are either silent or fanatically impractical regarding the life-and-death struggle in which some of them are engaged. Last winter some one sent me anonymously a circular showing how large a percentage of the inmates of certain penitentiaries claimed to have attended Sunday Schools in their childhood. The conclusion was drawn that the Christian religion tends to make criminals. Rather, such facts indi-

Danger to
young
people.

The Perils and Safeguards

cate that we have not "watched." As some one puts it, "we have not held our own," those who came to our hand. There came wolves upon them and bore them away while we stood by. Not many pastors who have not seen young men borne away by enemies of their souls, and condemned themselves that they did not see it in time. In a paper which came to me yesterday I note that one of my friends urges that the attempt to "revive revival methods" has failed and that the real growth of the church will come from care of our children, bringing them into the covenant and training them into the Christian life, so that they become church-members in natural order. One need not so coolly dismiss the effort to win present adults in order to stand with the writer in his plea for care of the children. Many Christian parents, engrossed with other concerns or strangely timid about their spiritual interests, seem to stand aside while the wolves tear away their children, grieving greatly afterward. Our cities cry out with such error. We explain it by the many seductions and temptations of the city. That is only half. When I said once that I supposed the floating of dis-

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ease germs in the air explained the prevalence of sickness, a wise physician told me I had left out half the reason—the unfit condition, the carelessness, the precedent weakness of those to whom the germs came. The temptations, the seductions of the city are terrible enough, God knows, but the blame for the failure of a life may not always be shifted to them. There was shameful carelessness, there was temporizing with evil, there was compromising with low morals in the homes, and there was a relaxing of zeal and vigilance of the church at just the critical period. It is easy to sit here half a thousand miles from the great city and write coolly of such matters, easy to adjust the burden of blame. It is quite another thing to understand the failure of children of godly parents. Yet all that has been said is true. The blame does lie in larger and lesser degree upon the Christian church and the Christian family for not holding for Christ what has once been given it for Him. The warning word of Paul comes to us still: “therefore watch.”

The Perils and Safeguards

II.

More perilous than attacks from without are the disloyalties and self-assertions from within. Attacks from within. The Ephesian elders were warned that perverse speaking men should arise from among themselves. The church has always suffered from that peril. I heard a young scientific man say once that to "a truly scientific mind" (his own, of course, being included), it was enough to excite suspicion regarding any opinion that it was commonly held. There are people who seem to act on that principle in religion. They love to read or to follow any new proposal. In our own day it must be occult. It must be phrased so that you catch only a glimmer of an idea at first reading. It must involve a little, at least, of the contradictory, must depreciate somewhat your common sense. Thus it flatters the vanity of the follower, revealing others fools who cannot understand it. It is amusing to observe the sweet resignation with which one particular company of faddists to-day dismiss all sturdy objections with the saying that of course you

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cannot understand their beliefs, since they are spiritually discerned! They understand them, to be sure, but as for you—! But that is only type of all. Most of these faddists come out of the church. They add no strength to it. They do not go into the ranks to make another section of the one force of the Kingdom of God. They become antagonists. Moreover they are arrant propagandists, rejoicing more over an addition from the church than from the outside world. The church has thus been the breeding place not only of its mightiest defenders, but also of its mightiest opponents. That is tribute to its breadth and freedom, but it involves peril.

Dealing with
religious
fads.

Against these destructive influences a wise watchfulness must be exercised that disciples be not drawn away after them. If the church prospers by violent attacks, so will such perverse opinions. Their leaders often desire nothing more than the opportunity to be martyrs for the cause of truth. Some such attacks seem to lose sight of the element of truth in the new notion. Some disregard the manifest honesty of many of its adherents. For one reason and another they accomplish little.

The Perils and Safeguards

A returning wanderer told a gentleman that he was brought back by the word of a friend which showed how all the fibre of the new teaching was taken from the old and what was really new in it was not worth while. Add to it this, that the old faith of the church contains great and important truths which the new omits, and the line of argument most efficiently used seems before us.

The unsettling of faddists is not so perilous with some as the doubts and denials issuing from scholarship. Dr. Van Dyke hits it off in his usual quotable way: "The coat of arms of the present age is an interrogation point rampant, above three bishops dormant, and its motto is Query?" A father told me recently that he would not send his son to college because he would certainly get him back with his religious ardor chilled if he had any faith left at all. A young man came to me once to talk about his life work, saying that he had purposed to preach, but his course in philosophy had so unsettled him that he had nothing to preach. In a Christian university a pupil of my own pursued a post-graduate course in studies which touched easily on religious sub-

The doubts
of scholar-
ship.

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jects. He told me he had not once heard a sympathetic reference to the religion of Christ nor the church, but had heard many caustic and sarcastic allusions to the church and its old follies. I spent a day, two or three years ago, in the classrooms of a theological seminary, attending four lectures by as many professors. In each one the class was made to smile or laugh at the ideas of their fathers regarding one or more religious matters, each reference being made in such superiority that the contempt of the speaker shone in it. The head of one of our Christian colleges praised his principal science man very highly in my hearing, adding that he regretted he was not a Christian, but hoped he was not inoculating the students with his scepticism. Another explained that it was very reluctantly that he chose for his professor of philosophy a man who denied the deity of Christ and the atonement, adding that he supposed such doubts would not appear in his teaching. Meanwhile a bright young fellow in school told his mother he heard his Sunday teaching laughed at five days a week, and the laugh was getting the better of the teaching.

The Perils and Safeguards

That is one side of the educational situation. Many of us know and believe in another side. A favorite college speaker declares that for the average boy the college is a safer place to-day than his own home. Of course, that depends on the boy and the college and the home. But it looks toward this better side. We know the godly, scholarly instructors in science and philosophy. We know the splendid array of leading men in any college on the side of Christ and the church. We know the deepened, enriched Christian character which many young fellows get in college, and which all could get. There are colleges whose first requirement for any instructor is that he be taught of the Lord. He is a poor instructor who teaches theology in a Latin or a mathematics classroom, but he is quite as poor who does not maintain a Christian attitude in his classroom in any branch. Most pastors can point to young men who have come back from college eager for church work and intelligent about it, Bible-taught, personal workers for souls. Some of us who have been on the inside are clear that much of the unsettling in

The other side.

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the faith of students does not begin in the classroom, but in entirely outside conditions.

The safe-guard.

But let both phases of the matter be true. The peril to the church is manifest. Most of the men who in the name of scholarship unsettle the faith of other men have come from within itself. Over them and their influence it must keep watch. It dare not narrow itself intellectually, that of course. It dare not seek to limit investigation. Equally it dare not give over its future to men who sneer at the essentials of its life. In so far as it must commit its youth to the scepticism of scholarship, it must throw around them the safeguards of faith.

Loss of faith in the pulpit.

Still greater is the peril from doubt and unrest when it appears in the pulpit. The airing of doubt, the eagerness to show that the faith of the church is erroneous when the speaker has gone only so far as that, the pulling up of anchor in order to drift, all of it is inexcusable. Most men pass through a time of fog and mist. Certainties get unsettled. It is not honest then to call them certainties. There are whole years when a minister feels that he dare not preach on this or that doctrine. It has lost verity to

The Perils and Safeguards

him. What then? Denounce it? Explode it before his people? Ridicule the fathers for holding it? God forbid! Does the man see that it is false, will he commit himself to its erroneousness, or does he simply not see its truth? Some of us thank God most for the sermons we thought out, but never preached. They were very scholarly, they set the church in error, they called to large liberty, and all that. We thought we felt almost sad at the necessity for preaching them, they would so wound the sensitive, conservative, moss-back brother. But in the good providence of God we did not preach them. We waited to brood over them. Somehow they do not seem so scholarly as they did. Their central ideas even look a little narrow and thin. We might have unsettled the faith of some and settled the faith of none. If a man has new solid ground on which he stands, ground which has the feel of the everlasting hills in it, let him shout out his call to other men wherever they are. Any pulpit is open for that. But if he has lost footing, let him be silent until he strikes rock again. Certainly one cause of the retarded growth of the church in recent years is the

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intellectual and doctrinal unsettling which the blindest can observe. It was a needed and unavoidable condition. The faith of the church is not so much changed as it has found new affiliation with the whole life of men, has become richer and fuller. The error lay in the peculiar notion of some of us that we must trumpet forth our unrest. An old minister said strikingly, "I regret no sermon which has come out with 'This is so;' I have regretted a good many which have come out with 'Is this so?'" Luther's word would have sounded very different if he had said, "Here I drift; I can do no other." Men outside have not asked for a cock-sureness that has forgotten how to question and investigate. They have not asked for bondage to a form. Not many have echoed the thoughtless cry against creeds. When a man said to me, "I believe that no man ought to have a creed," I doubt if he saw the contradiction in his sentence. Probably most men have rejoiced in the relaxing of doctrinal stringency, wisely or not. But how shall men be drawn to a faith which is not sure of itself? How shall men commit themselves to a vessel whose crew are all wearing life preservers? Several earnest

The outside
opinion.

The Perils and Safeguards

men have told me their own clear conviction of the essentials of the gospel of Christ, expressing their personal faith in Him, who were not drawn to the church because of the confusion that seemed to have arisen among its leaders as to their faith. Of course, the great thing is gained when a man comes in personal faith to Christ, but the church needs such men.

Thus the attacks upon the church from within, many of them not meant as attacks, have brought it peril and have retarded its growth. Thank God that we seem now passing out of the stage of unrest. The clouds break away from the mountain top and the unshaken granite appears. The essentials are showing themselves essentials. Battles of heart, which were never paraded, are ending in the victory of a stronger faith. The note of conviction is heard in book and sermon. The church faces outward to its work, not inward upon itself.

III.

Like the Ephesian Church, the church of to-day is in peril of loss of zeal. The damage is greater because the evil must be widespread.

The loss of
zeal.

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In every church are members who seem dull and dead, but they need not give the tone to the church as a whole. If only all were eager and zealous, the church would be irresistible. It might be uniformed zeal, not according to knowledge, yet by it the church would grow as it would not by knowledge unfired by zeal.

Some
causes of
loss among
individuals.

It would be too long a study to trace in detail the causes of loss of zeal. I watched a young man cool down in this manner: As a clerk he was at both church services, young people's meeting, midweek prayer meeting, and such other services as properly concerned him, efficient in all. As business success came and he rose gradually in his office, he dropped out of one duty after another, until with his admission to partnership he had become an irregular attendant upon morning service only. The process occupied about five years. Other men establish their families, enter a little more into society outside the church, and gradually drift away from it, ceasing any real labor in its behalf. The care of the world, the deceitfulness of riches—they still choke the growing soul. Young women get caught in social toils, they become professionally literary or commercially

Matt. 13:22.

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important, and the early zeal dies. No matter how it happens, the follower of Christ loses his first love and the whole church suffers. One of the English preachers visiting us two years ago called attention to a verse which has troubled not a few of us before and since. It is John 18:26. that one wherein the servant by the fire asked the denying Peter, "Did not I see thee with Him in the garden?" How could Peter resist that? Ah, as we resist similar queries. Might not our enemy sometimes come upon us, saying, "What! you here? You denying your Lord? Did not I see thee with Him a while ago? Are not you the man who spoke so confidently of your love for Him? Did you not stand up before men a while ago and claim Him for your Master?" Our lives have sagged, the tension is gone out of them, we have lost our zeal. Within six blocks of my own church I have found six men who were once Sunday School superintendents, who never go to church now.

The cure for individual cases must be individual. It must be brought to the heart of these chilled Christians that they do hurt to the whole church. The pain of their Lord from

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their denial must be brought to their own hearts in hope that they may go and weep bitterly and come again with the passion of love.

First cause
of loss of
zeal in the
church at
large.

Is it not clear, however, that the church has had its time of cooled ardor in the large way? Occupied with other things, we have lost our eagerness to win men to Christ. Some have lost their zeal because they have lost their sense of the need of men. Young people express their entire confidence that God would not condemn men anyway. If anything in the Bible seems to conflict with that easy notion, it is discounted or set down to the discredit of the human authors. The old notion of eternal banishment from God is too hard for people so nice as we are. The tone of preaching has changed as well. We are urging our people to be good because it is better for the present life. We declare that if in this life only we have hope, Christians would be of all men most happy. One of the religious papers asks whether we are not too afraid of preaching immortality. Would we not be a little ashamed of being Christians for the sake of going to heaven and escaping hell?

1 Cor. 15:2

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Now, perhaps, this life alone ought to mean as much to us as this life and the next mean together, but to most of us it does not. If we have any doubt about the need of Christ for the eternal life, even if we leave the next life out of account altogether, we lose some of our zest for winning men to Him. Do we run for the physician to relieve our loved one from an hour's pain as hastily as when he is wanted to relieve from a lifetime agony? Undoubtedly we are clear that the world needs the gospel of Christ to-day if it were to be blotted out of existence to-morrow, but we may not blink the fact that it would be less apt to care for that gospel if to-morrow's event were so assured. A return to our conviction of the eternal need of men and of the necessity of Christ will bring new zeal to many of us. A social gospel is very attractive, but society is not apt to be saved against the wish of the individuals who compose it. Whoever brings one man to fellowship with Christ helps effectually in the social renovation. Mr. Stelzle's recent book on the Church and Social Problems tells of a church over whose main door is cut the words: "I am the Door." But on the closed door

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beneath is a tin sign reading, "Go around to the other door." If we have the thought that there are many doors into the kingdom of God, we shall not be worried over seeing men wandering away from Him who is the Door. Robert Louis Stevenson writes to one of his friends, "There are only three possible attitudes—optimism, which has gone to smash; pessimism, which is on the rising hand, and which is very popular with some clergymen who think they are Christians; and this Faith, which is the Gospel."

Second
cause of loss
of zeal in
the church
at large.

Luke 5:5.

The other large cause of loss of zeal is the loss of the spirit of obedience. Read again the account of the calling of Peter, and see how he did a thing which he counted useless because it was Christ's wish. "At Thy word I will let down the net." Some Christians do not believe in foreign missions—why? Because they do not find it the will of their Master? They do not ask it. Some will not undertake Christian work, will not seek to become soul-winners. But what if the Master desires it? "O, I cannot," they say. Which is not the spirit which put the Crusades into his-

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tory with their cry of "God wills it!" Attention has been called to the three sayings:

"With men it is IMPOSSIBLE;"

"With God all things are POSSIBLE;"

"All things are POSSIBLE to him that believeth."

Have you laid stress in your reading on the second word of the familiar saying of Jesus: John 4:34.
"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me?" Generally we think of our obedience as the outlaying of our strength. Let us think of it instead as the gaining of our strength. Until we do His will we shall not have the meat of the inner life. With that obedience, dogged if it must be, will come power and energy and hearty zeal.

A gentleman hurried to small station in a southern state to catch a train. As he came near, the train thundered through at express speed. "Does that train never stop here?" he asked an old negro sitting near. "No, sah, it doan nevah stop, sah; it doan even hes'tate, sah," was the answer. But many a Christian

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loses his express speed, even stops in his obedience, rating some other will above His Lord's will. The whole church seems to fall into lethargy and to lose its first love.

The re-assurance of faith.

Shall I not hasten to save the saying from seeming gloomy or pessimistic? The church has never ceased to be the church of Christ, has never utterly forgotten His word, has never utterly failed Him, and never will. Jacob Riis says that Hans Christian Anderson was much afraid of being buried alive, and every night for years he pinned to his blanket, before he slept, a card, on which was written, "I guess I am only in a trance." Let no one mistake the lethargy of the church for death, let no one overlook the seventy times seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal or any other god. During the time when the church seemed indifferent there were souls all aflame with zeal. When the church seemed dull, men were burning out for God, putting to shame all our boasted energy.

1 Kings 18:19.

Rom. 13:11.

But now it is high time for all of us to awake out of sleep. If we have been shorn of power by anything that has been in the past, our vows have been renewed and power

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is returning. We are Samsons, newly vowed to God, not blinded, not grinding at a mill, but free to work marvels for Him. God set us afire with zeal! God make us irresistible by our vision of the need of man and the will of Christ!

IV.

So we shall escape the gravest of all perils,—the retribution of God. Whatever it may mean in full to remove the candlestick, it means at least this, that light-giving power is gone, that power for service is taken away, that the essential purpose of the light-bearing church is defeated. The books tell us that God cannot suffer. What they mean may be true, but something else is true. It is with bitter pain that such retribution will be brought upon any church, be sure of that. Last night I read the words of retribution: “These shall go away into everlasting punishment.” “Shall go away,” not be driven away, not be arrested and forcibly banished from God, “shall go away” by the very pressure of their own choice. And He that sits upon the throne of judgment has no

The retribu-
tion of God.

Rev. 2:5.

Matt. 25:46.

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Ezek. 33:11.

pleasure in the death of the wicked. It is His everlasting pain that there is everlasting sin. But what shall it be if He must remove the candlestick of an unrepentant church! I have two or three times heard Dr. Henry Bullard speak with hushed and almost awed voice of the strange Revelation expression, "The wrath of the Lamb."

Rev. 6:16.

We know the wrath of kings, of men, of mighty beasts,—but the lamb is hard to stir to wrath. It must be something of which we have little conception that He who is the sacrificial Lamb may become the Judge whose wrath is fearful. Let us not deceive ourselves with saying that it cannot be. The same Book which bears us glad news of love, bears news equally of the retribution of outraged love. The Jewish nation, once light-bearing candlestick of God—does it bear no argument? Men, once able to serve, sinning until the very heart and life of them is lost—are they not argument? The Hebrews writer brings us all to pause when he swings his argument into personal question: "How shall we escape if we neglect?" There is something to gain in life; let us remember there is something to escape as well. Any church may lose

Heb. 2:3.

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its light-giving power. The peril faced the Ephesian Church. It faces the present church.

There is a touch of deep sadness in the parable of the fig-tree that would not bear and also cumbered the ground. The keeper pleaded for one more year, and joined his master in pronouncing its doom if it should be still barren. Did it bear that critical year? If it did, the master rejoiced with the keeper. If it did not, the keeper counted the master wise in cutting it down. What is sadder than a church that is not a force in the kingdom of God, but only a hindrance? Is anything more greivous than a professed Christian who not only fails to bear fruit but is an actual cumberer of the ground, actually hinders others and lessens their strength?

Luke 13:6-9.

Mr. Steuart makes the doctor in The Samaritans say the deep truth most vividly: "God is loving and merciful, long suffering and wondrously slow to wrath. Only in the last resort will He smite. But make no mistake, He will not be mocked. The result of mocking is unspeakably terrible." If the deadness and indifference of the Ephesian Church imperilled its inmost purpose, so that it might be finally

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and irrevocably defeated, is any man able to prove that the same conditions may not carry with them the same unspeakably terrible peril still?

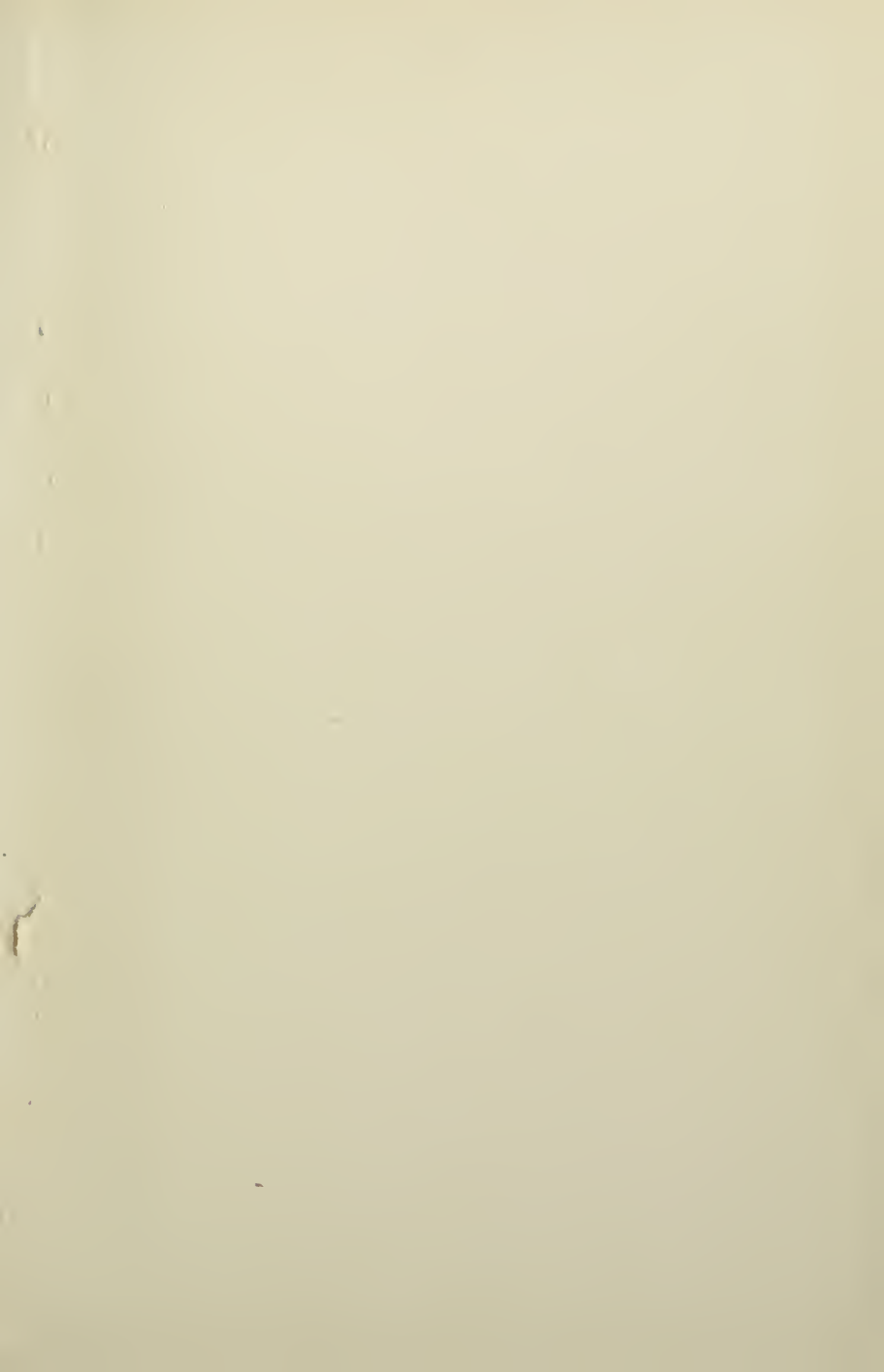
We need have no fear that the whole church of Christ will be defeated. It was the particular church and the "angel" of the church that were addressed. Is it your church, my brother, that is so imperilled? Is it yourself who stands in peril of the retribution of God? It is not the loss of your immortal soul that is feared. It is loss of your power to serve, the defeat of your inmost purpose, the removal of the candlestick from its place so that you are dead and lightless. It is the denial to your church of any place or power in the forces of God, retribution for its lack of zeal, for its indifference to the will and work of its Master.

In presence of death all men speak softly. Here, also, we are hushed, for here is deepest death. A dead church—it is the acme of sadness.

Ah, but a live church! It is the embodiment of power. It means reward, not retribution. It means victory for inmost purpose, not de-

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feat. It means trimmed candles in golden candlestick, fastened in a secure place by the hand of God. This we may make of our church. This, by His grace, shall the whole Church of Christ be!



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